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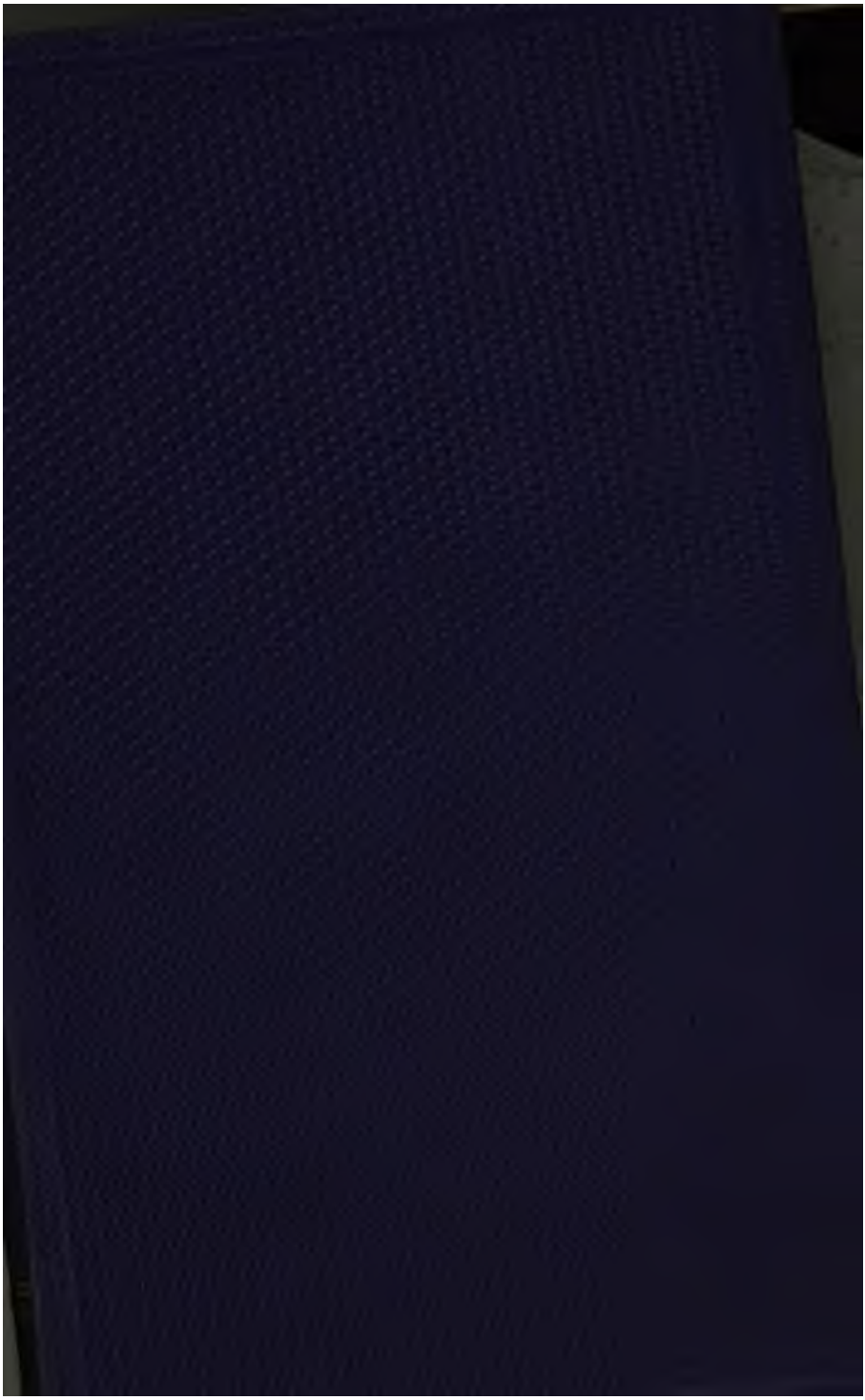

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MRS. BLAKE:

A STORY OF TWENTY YEARS.

BY

MRS. NEWTON CROSLAND.

AUTHOR OF "MEMORABLE WOMEN;" "HILDRED, THE DAUGHTER," ETC.

——— the spirit's gravitation
Still must differ from the tear's."
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1862.

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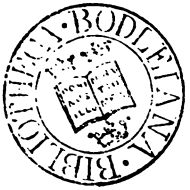
250. h. 39.



Billing, Printer, 103, Hatton Garden, London, and Guildford, Surrey.

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MRS. BLAKE.

CHAPTER I.

A WEDDING.

"If she be made of white or red,
Her faults will ne'er be known;
For blushing cheeks by faults are bred,
And fears by pale white shown:
Then if she fear or be to blame,
By this you shall not know;
For still her cheeks possess the same,
Which native she doth owe."

SHAKSPERE—*Love's Labour's Lost.*

IT was bitter March weather; though the sunshine seemed summer-like to those who gazed at it from a southern room, well warmed by a bright coal fire. The few trees which were in sight stood up stark and bare against the blue sky, from which every white plume of cloud had been swept, as if to feather the

sharp arrows of an east wind. In short, it was one of those mocking spring days so common to the English climate, and which, according to poor human temperaments, have an exhilarating or depressing effect on the spirits; for my own part, I love better the dullest day of mournful December.

Yet certainly the bright weather shed an air of gaiety over the modest pageant of a wedding which took place that morning in one of the western suburbs of London. The wedding guests properly so called, who were to cluster round the altar, scarcely amounted to a dozen individuals, but the little church —little because built when the now populous suburb was a mere village—seemed half full of an uninvited company of spectators. This concourse chiefly consisted of womankind who might have been called idle, but for their habit of hunting down the days and hours in a ceaseless round of visiting and gossiping; in the performance of which task they had of course heard the day fixed for Mrs. Bendoran's second marriage, in ample time to make up little parties, and pews-full for the occasion.

The leaven to this common-place throng

was composed of a few persons, former pupils of the young widow-bride, and others who really felt interested in herself and her little daughter. Selfish, worldly, vain, frivolous as the mass of mankind may be, there are always some better-natured people in a community, who look with an earnest and kindly sympathy on the struggles of the poor and dependent; and perhaps there is no object in the world that elicits this feeling more strongly than a widow of gentle breeding, with a child dependent on her exertions for support.

Clara Bendoran was more pretty than handsome; and she owed the all but universal admiration which she excited rather to an indescribable air and manner, which won for her a variety of eulogistic epithets, than to the absolute beauty of her form or features. A rigid observer might even have denied that the air and manner were always graceful. It is true she had had the advantage of associating with high-bred persons during the impressionable years of girlhood, and possessing, as she did in a striking degree, that feminine tact which perceives and appropriates the external show of much that lies fathoms deep beyond its grasp—her movements had grown

light and undulating, her gestures easy and gentle, her voice well tuned, and her words courteous, persuasive, deferential, according to the need of the hour; but there was not among her gifts and graces that ever-abiding inner spring of character which may be present in the hand labourer, and absent in a monarch, and which shows itself in a self-denying courtesy as naturally as a tree burgeons forth its wealth of blossoms. All that education and refined association could do to render her elegant and accomplished had been done with triumphant success; and only those few of her acquaintances who remained undazzled by her pretty person and feminine, winning ways, perceived a want of harmony in the character which, to superficial observers, seemed made up of many perfections. The defect thus briefly described often took long years to discover. In Clara Bendoran's heart one idol reigned supreme; while, as is commonly the case under such circumstances, she not only appeared, but really was, unconscious of her self-worship.

Let us listen to some of the whispered babble which floated about among the expectant groups assembled at K—— Church. There

may be exaggeration in their speech, and we shall perceive that much of their knowledge is but the gleanings of "hearsay;" nevertheless, there are grains of truth for the discreet to garner.

"What a change for her," ejaculated one; "four months ago she was trudging about through frost and rain, giving music lessons at five shillings the hour, and now I understand she is to go off in her own carriage!"

"They say he is very rich," replied another, "and that she will live in great style. But I don't wonder at her making a great match, I am sure; for you know, although she has been obliged lately to work for her living, she is the widow of an officer in the army, and a lady every inch."

"I don't wonder, either," interposed a sentimental dame, "provided she can make up her mind to the change. But you did not know Captain Bendoran, I believe, and no description can give you any idea of what a handsome, gentlemanly man he was. And that, you remember, was quite a love-match—an elopement in fact, and he thereby offended his uncle, who had wanted him to marry a Lady Somebody, and so lost a fine property

in the North, that was left to a second cousin instead of to him."

"Poor thing! she must have seen a great deal of trouble. I am sure I hope she will be happy now; what sort of person is Mr. Blake?—did you ever see him?" asked the first speaker of her friend.

"Yes, once; just for a minute," replied the lady addressed, "and I am nearly sure that is he who came just now to the vestry door; of course it is—well, the bride seems inclined to keep him waiting."

"Pity he is not a little taller; they must be nearly the same height, I think. I heard he was eight and thirty, but he looks two or three and forty."

"The being bald gives an appearance of age."

"Well, so it does; and after all, there is no great disparity, for she must be seven or eight and twenty."

"At least," said one of the listeners.

"I hope he will be kind to her little girl," returned the former speaker.

"I should think so; and besides, he is a business man, and although so wealthy, goes to his counting-house every day, so that he

will not be likely to interfere with his wife's domestic management."

"Still it is a trying relationship on which he is entering; I suppose even the widow's pension ceases on her second marriage, and the poor child's infirmity often renders her awkward and uninteresting. Even her mother feels conscious of the drawback that it is."

"Poor little Georgy! Yes, it is a pity that she stammers."

"Georgy! I thought her name was Agnes?"

"Agnes Georgina," replied the lady who had known Captain Bendoran; "but she is always called Georgy, after her father."

"I heard her mother call her Agnes several times the other day," replied the former speaker.

"Then that is something new; but hush! here they are, and really she looks lovely!"

The sibillation of the many whispers ceased suddenly, giving place to the rustle of silks, as the bridal party advanced up the aisle of the church.

Leaning on the arm of Mr. Pennington, the friend at whose house she and Mr. Blake had met, the bride advanced, looking at a little distance an undulating mass of delicate pearl

grey satin and white lace, surmounted by a white chip bonnet—for this was a wedding of long, long ago, before the bridal bonnet was superseded by the bridal veil, and I must paint the picture as it was photographed that morning on many a memory. As the procession advanced, a charming face was to be recognised beneath the chip bonnet, where massive curls of dark hair seemed struggling to escape from all confinement. Hazel eyes, of oriental shape and lustre, gleamed like stars from behind a thin cloud of lace, and the palpable agitation of the moment gave a new charm to a countenance whose usual fault was a want of mobility.

Mrs. Pennington, whose feathers and flounces by no means stifled her tender woman's heart, had already her handkerchief in requisition; while her two daughters, damsels of the ordinary young-lady pattern, felt too happily consequential in their office of bride-maids, too much pleased with their pretty new pink dresses, and too ignorant of the heart's tangles, and of life's turning points, to have any tears at command on the present occasion.

Following the Misses Pennington came a cousin of the bride, Elizabeth Hardy by name.

"A single woman of a certain age," her life, to those who could read it, had silently asserted the dignity of her order; while, even with the chance acquaintances of an hour, there was something in her calm good sense, her gentle voice, and her large charity of speech, which won from them liking and respect, and an immunity from that profane and stupidest of all scorn, scorn of the old maid. Elizabeth Hardy led by the hand her young relative and god-daughter, the little fatherless girl whose mother was to take to-day a new name, and who already had been taught to frame her stammering speech to the disused word, Papa.

Agnes was nearly eight years old, and precocious in intellect, partly, perhaps, from nature, partly because, an only child, she had had few child companions; and partly because her infirmity of speech had thrown back upon her own soul some of the mental force which, under ordinary circumstances, evaporates in speech. The child understood more of the solemnity of the occasion than might have been imagined, and of the change in her own position which was impending. Agnes did not in the least degree resemble her mother, and if there was about her any promise of

beauty of another order, it was like a flower, still very closely folded in the bud. Her hair, I suppose, must be called English brown, but if you had taken one of her heavy curls in your hand and held it towards the sunlight, you would have found it really of an indescribable hue; one thread seemed of pure flaxen, another of red gold, a third of glossy chestnut, the whole melting into a soft shine that reminded one of the aureola of a saint.

But it was by no means a saint-like countenance that was set amid the radiant hair; rather was it the face of a somewhat self-willed child, eager to know, willing to do, ready to endure, passionate against wrong, yet generous, venerative, and grateful. Her features were only tolerably regular, though the chin was round and massive. Her eyes were dark grey, and though large and bright, were more deeply set than were her mother's. Her complexion was not very good; it seemed to have caught a faint tinge from the yellowing colour of her hair, and she was generally pale, although when, as now, a rose tint mounted to her cheek it illumined the whole countenance. The child was dressed in white muslin—very insufficient apparel for such a

day—and wore a simple straw hat with trimming of white ribbon, so that the eye rested on her little figure as the one colourless object in the gay group. Yet as the wedding party ranged itself round the altar, it so happened that the light fell upon little Agnes through a stained glass memorial window, and thus her white frock seemed tinged with purple and crimson. A type, perhaps, of childhood that must ever be bathed in surrounding influences.

The irrevocable vows were spoken, the mystical ring was placed, and the exhortation and benediction were said. A tear or two had dropped on the bride's bonnet strings, Miss Hardy's eyes had brimmed but not overflowed, Mrs. Pennington had wept quietly but freely, and little Agnes had looked at Mr. Blake throughout the ceremony with a curious, earnest gaze that had in it a world of childish questioning; nevertheless a certain befitting grave composure prevailed on the occasion, so that the spectators had really nothing to remark, except that "the bride looked lovely, and that everything seemed to have been charmingly arranged."

Then the bride and bridegroom drove off in their new carriage to Mr. Pennington's

house at Bayswater, where the wedding breakfast was to be given; and the guests followed in detachments, little Agnes nestling under a corner of Miss Hardy's ermine tippet for warmth, and Mrs. Pennington asking pardon for her weakness and emotion, as if they were crimes to have had the solemnity of her own marriage vows recalled to her mind—to have had their coinage stamped as it were with a new die, by listening to a repetition of them—to have felt warm sympathy for her friends—and all a mother's vague anxiety for her untried daughters expand, until it had found rest in a prayerful confiding of them to God.

The wedding breakfast passed off as such collations generally do. There was the usual amount of speech-making and of miserable jesting; and there were the customary attempts to force conversation which refused to be led. One guest headed the forlorn hope of a charge of politics, that soon wavered and dropped; and a punster made the desperate single-handed attempt to retrieve matters—his missiles having only the palpable effect of tightening the gag. All was unavailing; notwithstanding congratulations and speeches, threadbare common-places, and the very true

truisms which were abundantly spoken, it was a somewhat dull affair; and nobody was really sorry when Mrs. Compton Blake retired to don her travelling dress, and there were symptoms of the party breaking up.

The newly-married pair purposed spending a few weeks on the Continent; but their house in Curzon Street was already pronounced ready for occupation, and thither, under the charge of Elizabeth Hardy, little Agnes was at once to be taken. As the child was warmly attached to her cousin Beta, as Miss Hardy was called, her temporary separation from the bride was not thought of as a trouble by anyone. Although at parting she clung about her mother affectionately and tearfully, she did not express any grief on the occasion; but when Mr. Blake stooped to kiss and embrace her, calling her his dear little daughter, the child seemed quite overpowered, tears, hitherto almost restrained, flowed abundantly, and she made an effort to speak rapidly, as if her little heart were surcharged with much she had to say. But, alas! her infirmity, occasional and fitful as it was, asserted itself now—her broken, incoherent speech was wholly incomprehensible,

and conscious that the impotent hour was upon her, she yielded after a short contest, and no longer attempting to speak, threw herself into her stepfather's arms, and clung about his neck in a sort of dumb agony.

Unused to children, and entertaining a masculine dislike to "scenes," Mr. Blake looked dismayed and almost frightened—so that, after all, the mother's last words to her little girl were not of fondness, but "Agnes!—Agnes! —you must control yourself—do you not see you quite annoy—your papa?"

CHAPTER II.

THE MARCH WIND.

"Children are God's Apostles, day by day
Sent forth to preach of love, and hope, and peace."
LOWELL.

IT was between four and five o'clock in the afternoon when Miss Hardy and her young charge took leave of their hosts; and when they arrived at May Fair, the March sunshine still glistened among the top windows of the tall London houses. The door was opened by a respectable middle-aged servant, out of livery, who promptly came forward and assisted the lady and child to alight, and then ushered them into the dining-room, where a bright fire was blazing cheerily. Jackson was a faithful and attached servant of Mr. Blake's, and deserves a few words of intro-

duction. For ten years he had been more the real ruler of the establishment than the master himself; for Mr. Blake was an easy-tempered man, one who loved a calm, even routine of life, and had discovered that this composed home-atmosphere is not to be maintained by a restless interference and dictation in details of management. Compton Blake enjoyed even his recreations with that pleased gravity which foreigners find so characteristic of the English nature; and whether examining a highly satisfactory balance sheet, dispensing a refined and generous hospitality, or enjoying his favourite indulgence of the opera —and the two latter had been his most apparent pleasures—it was rarely indeed that his demeanour altered, or his spirits rose to any exuberant pitch. Now to this sort of man, a clever managing servant, trustworthy to the core, is a real treasure, that, after all, is poorly paid for by mere money wages.

Jackson was a servant of this description. He understood his master thoroughly, and knew his likes and dislikes to a tittle, providing and avoiding accordingly. Mr. Blake appreciated the worth of his humble friend, and there was a tie of real regard and mutual

respect between them. Of course, Jackson had not highly approved of the change now taking place in his master's condition; it was not to be expected from human nature that he should have entered with great delight into all the ideas associated with the coming of a mistress to head the establishment where he so long had ruled; but, like the sensible man that he was, he determined to make the best of the affair. Certainly his master had a perfect right to please himself—Jackson saw this truth clearly, and his consequent opinion he announced fearlessly to the indignant cook and irate housemaids; and though, while removing into the new house—which, under other circumstances, might have been such a pleasure—there were constant reminders of the new dynasty at hand, honest Jackson did his duty faithfully and manfully, and the result of all his arrangements was that an unmistakeable air of comfort already pervaded the house in Curzon Street.

Some half-dozen boxes and packages had just arrived from Mrs. Blake's lodgings, and, to confess the truth, they comprised all the dower of personal property she possessed. Strewed about the hall they had a meagre and

forlorn appearance; for they did not consist of heavy substantial leathern trunks, which seem the fit receptacles for rich apparel, but of paper or canvas-covered boxes of humble pretension, untidy-looking parcels, and loose music tied in heaps. An officer's sword, in its scabbard, together with gauntlets and sash, seemed at the first glance in strange companionship with so many feminine appurtenances. Miss Hardy's box and carpet-bag, in consequence of bearing her name, had already been carried to her chamber.

Jackson was respectfully assiduous in offering refreshment. Dinner could be ready in half an hour, he said; but Miss Hardy infinitely preferred tea; and having thrown off bonnet and shawl, she soon found herself before the "hissing urn," and with several substantial delicacies on the table, in addition to "tea and toast." Meanwhile little Agnes had seated herself by the fire, and seemed basking in its warmth with pure animal enjoyment. Yet the child was quieter than usual; for, being attached to her cousin, she was free from nervous fear in her presence, and often prattled on in her society with only a slight and occasional betrayal of her infirmity.

"Now, Georgy, dear, come to the table," exclaimed Miss Hardy, when the tea was poured.

The little girl obeyed, though somewhat languidly, and as she took her seat she observed,

"Mamma says I am not to be called Georgy any more."

"Ah, I forgot; habit is so strong," returned the cousin, colouring slightly at her own thoughtlessness; but she continued, "Agnes, you know, is your first name, and perhaps it was foolish ever to call you anything else. Besides, Agnes is a much prettier name than Georgy; do you not think so?"

"No: but that is perhaps because of a reason."

"What reason, my love?"

"Because Georgy was papa's name, and because mamma loved me much more when she called me Georgy."

"Dear child," exclaimed Miss Hardy, with emotion, and drawing the little girl towards her as she spoke, "do you not think we all love you as much as ever, now?"

"I think you do," said the little girl, bursting into tears and throwing her arms round

Miss Hardy's neck. "I think you do, Cousin Beta, because you are always good."

"No one is always good, my pet," returned Miss Hardy, forcing a smile; "and therefore, though your thought is true, your reason for it is false. I love you very fondly, my dear little god-daughter, but I will not run the risk of misleading either you or myself by trying to find out the reasons of my love."

A childish hug was the response to this declaration, and presently the little girl murmured, as if she were making a confession, "Do you know I have often thanked God for being called Georgy—do you think He was angry with me for liking it so much, and therefore took away my name from me?"

"My darling, be assured God is never angry with us for thanking Him for any of his good gifts; and He has not taken your name from you."

"Not?"

"Certainly not; you were christened Agnes Georgina, and Agnes Georgina you must remain. There is no law in the world which can take your name from you."

"But mamma has changed her name to-day."

"True, but not her Christian name—my love, she is still Clara."

"But she has changed away papa's name, that is what I mean?"

"Quite true, because it is the custom for a wife to take her husband's surname, but your name, Georgina, can never be changed. We can hide it sometimes if we like, or, properly speaking, put more forward your other name. I can show you a symbol of what I mean: there is a little brown mole on your temple—few of your friends know anything about it, because your curls always hide it, but there it is, and there it will be as long as you live. Just so may Georgy be in the shadow, and yet still exist."

"Only the mole is not pretty."

Surely there is no antagonist like a clever child, for having the last word in an argument, or yielding that unsatisfactory consent which is conviction against the will! It was well, perhaps, that Miss Hardy changed the subject; but very soon she found cause for a new anxiety about her young charge. The child had no appetite, but was thirsty and feverish, and evinced signs of having taken a violent cold. Early repose was one of the natural

remedies to adopt, and wearied and suffering, the little girl was ready to lay her head on the pillow. As they passed through the hall, however, on their way up stairs, Agnes stopped for a minute or two, and drawing the sword from among the packages, she asked a servant to carry it up stairs, adding—

"It belonged to my old own papa, and it is to hang up in my bed-room. Mamma promised me."

She carried the gauntlets and sash herself, and her first act on entering the room denominated hers, was to smooth out these memorials on her bed, fold them with a womanish tidiness, and place them in a drawer.

Jackson had witnessed the little scene in the hall, and of trifling importance as it seemed, it was something that clung for ever to his memory. The courteous yet absolute air of command which the little girl displayed, bore all the characteristics of birth and breeding; the tiny finger on her lip—placed as if this gesture enabled her to measure out her words distinctly—gave a certain individuality to her manner that was not without its charm; while the dumb memorial of her father's sword, seemed a tacit assertion that though

the new comer might be poor, she was at least a gentleman's daughter.

Taken as a class, servants are perhaps much less mean and mercenary than people who have never tried to draw out their better qualities are apt to suppose, and not seldom are they better judges of character and manner than their employers. Certain it is that a tender respect for little Agnes took possession of honest Jackson's heart that very evening; a genuine emotion, that was not only irrespective of his "interests," but was strong enough to stand up in opposition to them, if need be.

An over-indulged child, or any person impatient of suffering, would not have passed the night as Agnes did, without disturbing the household and clamouring for relief; for during those long hours her little frame was raging with fever, and her head aching the dreadful headache which preceded the full outbreak of her malady. When, at seven o'clock the next morning, Miss Hardy hurried on her dressing-gown and visited her young charge, she was terrified at the condition in which she found her, and sent at once for the nearest medical man, without even waiting to complete her own morning toilette.

Every now and then we read in the obituary of a death from bronchitis or influenza, and about as often we hear some lamentable story of a death proceeding from cold in some other shape; but, unless we have had stern experience of such cases, we find it difficult to realise that that which in the guise of a slight cold is half despised, and thought a nuisance rather than a distress, should ever deepen its character, and become, as an old physician quaintly described it, "a touch of the finger of Death." The truth is, we have grown fearfully familiar with the plague of our changeful climate; a plague as rapacious and deadly as any which fills an eastern lazar-house. But it does not come in so hideous a mien—it toys with us, as might a sleek, well-fed tiger-cub, and we do not think of what the grip may be when the fangs shall have grown; and so we toy with the danger in return, and for any mad vanity or thriftless thrift that comes uppermost, nine-tenths of English people court the scourge of their land a hundred times in a year.

Agnes was a victim to her mother's thrift, that would not from the small sum dragged together for her wedding outfit provide a

warmer dress for her little daughter—to her vanity, which still decreed she must look her best at any cost of discomfort to the child. Thus it happened that on one of the bitterest mornings of the year, Agnes had left off her soiled merino frock and taken to an old white muslin—and at the same time received the seeds of disease which it might take years to eradicate. Not only the "finger of Death," but the very hand of the destroyer, seemed laid upon her; and when, after nights and days of suffering, the grasp was released and the crisis passed, little Agnes was too weak to stand, and too feeble to raise her voice beyond a half articulate murmur.

Yet she remembered and understood nearly everything that had passed around her; she knew that her cousin Beta had not left her night or day, that three different doctors had taken her hand, and that one of them—he with the kindest face, and who somehow seemed to know everything she thought and felt—had come a great, great many times. She perfectly comprehended that her cousin Beta could not write to her mamma till two days after she began to get better, in consequence of Mr. and Mrs. Blake moving about,

and only having given an address somewhere in advance; and now that the child believed God intended she should live, she was very glad that it had thus fallen out, and that her mamma's pleasure in France was not marred by knowing how ill she had been until the worst was over; or Mrs. Blake's stay there shortened by apprehension about the child.

Now these emotions were only partly owing to a natural generosity of character that belonged to Agnes Bendoran—not entirely; they were weighted also by a dull, vague consciousness that fell like a cloud about her heart—a consciousness that she was a care, an incumbrance to her mother, and she felt a sort of glad pride that her illness had not troubled or disturbed her. Young as she was, the little girl had sense enough to know that she must have been a great trouble and anxiety to Miss Hardy, but this thought did not seem to distress her. True it is that she did not measure the extent of that anxiety, or the degree of fatigue which had been incurred in watching and tending her; for even the most precocious children have rarely any sympathy for what does not touch some point of their own experience. They take all the care which

is bestowed, and the largest love that can be lavished on them, like little monarchs receiving their due—and they are right. It is we who fail in our duty, we who falter in our allegiance to God's purest image on earth, when we neglect the precious charge confided to us; or when, having done our best and our uttermost, we indulge in vain-glorious satisfaction, and talk profane nonsense about the child's obligation to us, as if it were not a privilege to have been permitted to render such service.

A fortnight had passed, and though sufficiently recovered to sit up, Agnes had not yet left her room. It was a late spring; the treacherous east wind still prevailed, and Dr. Danvers had forbidden his little patient to stir until the weather became more genial. So, wrapped up cosily and comfortably in a shawl belonging to Miss Hardy, Agnes sat near the fire, with a table drawn before her, on which lay various objects gathered together for her amusement. Books were there, and pictures; the latter being, next to the telling of stories, about the most unfailing resource for the entertainment of children. A box of paints, originally a birthday gift from Miss Hardy, was also near, showing evident signs

of hard service, for Agnes had evinced somewhat more taste and fondness for drawing and painting than that commonly displayed by children in their trick of scratching and scribbling caricature resemblances of different objects. Certainly she had already a love for beautiful colours, and though it was poorly satisfied in the dull opaque hues of her common paints, she yet found pleasure in blending and contrasting them. Years before her mind recognised or analysed the sentiment, the little girl vaguely felt the mystery which to certain natures dwells in colours—a mystery always struggling to explain and clear itself, but even when most articulate—as in a gorgeous sunset, or the flash of a diamond—still pointing upward with "rayonnant finger," as if to say, "not here, but There shall my perfections be unrolled, and my symbols deciphered."

On the floor lay an old shabby doll, its face downward, and its arms stretched out in an attitude of abject prostration; but alas! its owner regarded it with unpitying contempt, and did not even stoop to restore it to the table from which it had fallen. The truth has to be owned that Agnes did not care,

never had cared, for dolls. I know some people will be shocked at this confession, and will consequently decline to accept my Agnes Georgy as a heroine on any terms; but the fact is, the whole kingdom of dolldom was unsatisfactory to her—as it often is to little girls whom circumstances render prematurely thoughtful. Of course she did not divine the reasons for her indifference, for children rarely trace, as the more observant among their elders often may, the springs which move them—and very often she had thought humbly of herself in connection with the subject, and fancied that there must be some inferiority of her own character which prevented her sympathising in the delights other little girls experienced in scolding, and slapping, and otherwise reproving their mimic children, whom, even in their caresses, they generally treated like the slaves of a despot.

It might have been noticed that morning that Agnes was more than usually serious, and that neither books nor paints quite satisfied her mind. At last she observed to Miss Hardy—

"Cousin Beta, I should like to write a little letter to my—my new papa, if you will be so

good as to enclose it the next time you write to mamma."

"Certainly, my love, I will do so if you wish it; but how is it you think of writing to Mr. Blake, instead of to your mamma?"

"Because I have something to write I wished to say to him, and could not say to him the day he was married to mamma."

These words recalled to Miss Hardy's mind the emotion the little girl had evinced when parting from Mr. Blake the day of the wedding, and she looked at Agnes for a moment with a curious wonder, without being able to guess what was dwelling in her mind.

"Do you wish then to write your letter today?" asked Miss Hardy, after a short pause.

"If you please, Cousin Beta, and if you will be so kind as to rule me some lines. I have got my letter all in my head, and can soon write it."

Accordingly Miss Hardy ruled lines, and mended a pen, sending for her own desk, that Agnes might write with ease and comfort. The child did not seek any counsel in the affair, but set about her task with the calmness belonging to a settled purpose; only once she asked assistance, begging Miss

Hardy to tell her how the word "exactly" was spelled, and as she looked up her cousin observed that Agnes's cheek was flushed, and that her eyes sparkled with excitement. Written between double lines, the letter covered three sides of paper, and when it was finished Agnes proceeded to close and direct it, without handing it to Miss Hardy for inspection.

It was quite evident that the little scribe had no intention of communicating the contents of her epistle even to her dear cousin, and happily Miss Hardy had too much sense and good feeling to ask for a confidence that was not proffered—certain as she was, from her thorough knowledge of the child, that her intentions were good and her words truthful. Perhaps she would have liked to see that letter—and many persons would have thought themselves justified in demanding a perusal of it. But Miss Hardy had peculiar feelings with regard to children—her own childhood had not been happy—and the experience of that period of her life had taught her a delicate consideration for children's feelings, and brought to her mind a conviction that strength and individuality of

character are best promoted by some exercise of free-will even from an early age, and by the engendering of a certain moral responsibility which is never felt by the young while they are entirely in leading-strings. Even if mistakes are often made—what then? There is a sort of individual experience which every soul has to obtain for itself before it can gain wisdom, and the earlier in life it is won, the less does it cost. Many a childish blunder that brings down no deeper woe than a harsh reproof and an hour's weeping, sows a seed of experience that in after-life grows to be a beacon that may guard off life-errors.

Moreover, Miss Hardy reflected that in the new relation on which Agnes and her stepfather were entering—truth and sincerity in word and deed were the only foundations of happiness between them. She knew that truth and sincerity cannot perfectly exist where individuality of character is masked, and this individuality is concealed when even a child's letter is dictated or altered. Accordingly she enclosed Agnes's letter, like the loyal woman that she was, without having a suspicion of its contents.

CHAPTER III.

A CHILD'S LETTER.

"En amour si l'on n'est bourreau l'on est victime."
MADAME EMILE DE GIRARDIN.—*Ironie.*

TWENTY years ago a trip to Paris was a little event in the life of an Englishwoman; a thing to be dreamed of, and thought of, and talked about both in anticipation and retrospection; and it must be confessed that Mrs. Compton Blake entered into the pleasures her visit to the gay capital afforded with avidity and thorough enjoyment.

Her first marriage had been what the world calls a love-match; and since it was quite true that Captain Bendoran had offended a wealthy relative, and relinquished brilliant prospects to make her his wife, we may fairly presume that his attachment to her was ardent and

sincere. No doubt she had entertained that passionate regard which very young people are apt to mistake for the subtler soul-sympathy which is life-enduring, and which, strengthening with the growth of character, is not ruffled by time's advancing tide, or dismayed at the stranded wrecks of youth, beauty, and worldly prosperity, which may be cast upon life's shore.

The young wife had been spared any very severe or protracted test of her affections. True, her marriage had also displeased her own friends and relatives—for the most part worldly persons, who had brought her up among them a portionless orphan, and calculated on her beauty and accomplishments securing for her a reasonably wealthy husband, —and who felt themselves injured and ungratefully treated by her elopement with a poor gentleman. But the buoyant spirits of early youth, and the glamour of first love, during the three or four years which succeeded her marriage, had redeemed her from any painful recognition of poverty and worldly cares, and it was only during the long illness which preceded her husband's death that Clara really began to learn some of the hard lessons of life.

Yet that initiation soon opened to her a

wider knowledge. The days of her widowhood were days of dull toil and anxious struggle, in which, beneath a certain mask of humility and apparent patience, her mind fretted against its bars, and she grew not only to exaggerate the present evils of her lot, but to look upon money as the panacea for all troubles, and its possession the one aim she must keep in view. She did not avow her estimate of wealth, any more than do usually the thousands of decently-conducted people who share her opinions; and moreover, she had an instinctive feeling that a female fortune-hunter is looked upon with even greater contempt than is a male adventurer. Nevertheless, long before she met Mr. Blake, Clara Bendoran had thoroughly made up her mind to watch her opportunities, and whenever the fitting time arrived, to marry a man who would lift her above toil and money anxieties, and surround her with all those luxuries and refinements her nature was so well calculated to enjoy.

Behold her, then, revelling in the first taste of that delicious draught for which she had sighed, believing it to be the very elixir of life. In the French capital, in a splendid apart-

ment half-walled with looking-glass, that countless times reflected her own graceful figure and its surroundings, sat the bride, attired in the most becoming Parisian fashion. Already had a French maid been engaged as her permanent attendant, and very edifying was it to behold the *nonchalante* air with which Mrs. Blake gave her orders, and superintended the packing of certain costly dresses, shawls, and laces—a single article of which, in several instances, outweighed the entire value of Clara's wardrobe at any former period of her existence. But travellers, we know, have often commented on the wonderful adaptability of the human being to circumstances; and this truth is occasionally illustrated by the ease with which a certain order of men and women fall into habits of luxury and extravagant self-indulgence, directly the opportunity for their exercise occurs—as if they were to the manner born.

Not that Compton Blake was himself what the world calls an extravagant or self-indulgent man. He dressed plainly, lived temperately, being not more of an epicure than a gentleman should be, and preferred equipages that were sound and serviceable rather than showy;

nevertheless, though just now his wife called him a "generous darling," and the "dearest and the most munificent husband in the world," I believe there never had been a period in his life in which he had acted in so systematically selfish a manner. Not that he felt, or knew, or could have been made to see the selfishness, or the system; of course not—people never do under such circumstances see themselves as "ithers see them;" but it was to him the highest of gratifications to gratify his bride, to receive from her smiles and loving words as guerdon for his magnificent presents, and to see her pretty person set off to the greatest advantage. Had he a thought of elevating her being above the frivolities and vanities of life? Had he an aspiration to make Marriage, to two souls, the means of double strength whenever good was to be achieved, or temptation resisted?—Perhaps some Recording Angel knows; but if these heavenly ministrants only take account of good deeds that have wholly pure motives, then can we understand how lean a ledger would answer for the Great Book of virtuous actions, and how impossible it would be to weave any robe of human righteousness.

Mrs. Blake had now been a fortnight in Paris, and seemed already an habituée of the gay city. The tone of the place found an echo in her nature; and she looked every inch the "*dame comme il faut.*" Over a *robe de chambre* of fresh, white muslin she had drawn a scarlet shawl with rainbow-tinted border, and as she lounged upon a sofa, resting her head upon that dainty hand that had just pushed back one half of her clustering curls —the better to watch Julia's proceedings —and with the rich fabrics to which I have alluded massed carelessly around her, there was something artistic in her appearance, which a painter might have been glad to transfer to his canvas. And when his picture was painted he would, perhaps, have called a council of his intimate friends and asked them to find a name for his work. Bluff Paterfamilias would have suggested, "That's the way the money goes!"—"All is vanity," would have been proposed by a crotchety creature who thinks the world would be regenerated by the re-establishment of sumptuary laws A "peopleish" individual would have recommended the introduction of a poor dependant in a cotton gown and old straw

bonnet, and then that the picture should be called "The Contrast." Yet, perhaps, finally, the painter would only have exhibited "An interior in Paris—Portrait of a Lady."

But the world has never been enriched by the picture I have indicated, and the pose of the subject was quickly altered by the entrance of Mr. Blake carrying a handful of letters, and the withdrawal of Julie from the apartment. The wedding tour had included a scamper through Belgium, but to numerous correspondents Paris had been given as a sort of head quarters address; very varied, therefore, were the communications which arrived simultaneously. As the seals were broken, chit-chat gossip and congratulations from a lady friend followed satisfactory indications of business from Mr. Blake's confidential clerk; and while the bride set herself to examine Miss Hardy's long letter, Mr. Blake leaned back in his chair to master the contents of a closely-written crossed sheet which he recognised as coming from his widowed sister.

In the act of opening Miss Hardy's letter, an enclosure dropped from it;—the polite husband stooped to pick it up—and in doing so perceived he had only taken possession of a

note addressed to himself in a child's hand-writing.

"What is this, my love?" he exclaimed, turning the note first on one side, then on the other, as if he thought he had hardly the right to open so strange-looking an epistle.

Mrs. Blake leaned forward to see the superscription, and with a bright smile replied, "It is a letter for you from Agnes—what an odd child she is!" This the mother said; but certainly in the preceding moment of time she had become assured that her cousin Beta could only have enclosed a highly discreet, satisfactory, and every way proper epistle. It was a mental mistake of the sort we are all apt to make when we judge of characters opposite to our own—by the sole knowledge of what we should have done under the like circumstances. And so the widow's pleading and Miss Hardy's full and particular account of Agnes's illness, yielded the precedence to the following lines, which husband and wife read together.

"My dear Papa,

"I hope you did not think I was naughty and cross because I could not help crying the day you went away. I am afraid I have been

often naughty, but, indeed, I was not naughty then. I do not know exactly why I cried, and it made me very unhappy to think my crying vexed you. Please do quite forgive me for it. What I wanted to say to you, and could not say to you, was about your not liking children. I think it is very unfortunate, but you know, I cannot help being a child, only I promise to try not to be troublesome to you, and always to go away when you tell me, till I shall grow older and not be so troublesome, because I know, dear papa, you are very good and kind to give mamma such a nice house and so many pleasant things. Please give my love to mamma, and tell her I am nearly well now, except a little cough, which I hope will soon go away, and believe me,

"Your affectionate daughter,

"AGNES G. BENDORAN."

There was a brief pause; half-a-dozen angry phrases had coined themselves in Mrs. Blake's mind, and leaped forward for expression, but had been restrained. Her husband broke the silence by exclaiming with real pathos, "What does the dear child mean? I never said that I disliked children—nor is it true.

The poor little thing has been made unhappy by some abominable falsehood. I must write to her myself and tell her that I mean to love her, and pet her very much."

"Children are none the better for over-petting," replied the mother, whose irritation of feeling had not yet subsided. "I think it is a most improper letter for Agnes to have written, or for my cousin to have forwarded."

"My sweet Clara, why so?"

"If you do not see why—I cannot help it" —and now a fretful weeping commenced which closed all discussion, as the lover husband was entirely absorbed in assuaging it by gentle words and fond caresses. Truth to tell, that child's letter was a great vexation to the mother; the allusion to a "nice house" and "pleasant things," stung her pride, and she was vexed with Agnes for having remembered that white lie—as she termed it, when talking with her own conscience—about Mr. Blake disliking children, a lie coined for some bygone special occasion, when she wanted her shabbily-dressed child out of the way. She felt safe that her doting, confiding husband never would suspect her of the "abominable falsehood"—but still the affair was a lesson

to her. She had already discovered that Mr. Blake could more rapidly forgive any error than that of deliberate deception; and now there was her little daughter found treasuring up and ruminating over an expression that, when spoken, had not elicited a reply or observation. Truly she must take care what she was about. Even when apprised by Miss Hardy's letter of the alarming illness through which her child had passed, very little real tenderness arose in her mind to moderate her anger.

But it was now high time that Mr. Blake should attend to his sister's communication. Though it was a letter of real and grave importance, I doubt much if it touched his feelings as deeply as the simple words of little Agnes had done. To be sure he was used to his poor sister's pleadings, and I fear somewhat hardened against them. Mrs. Farrell was some years her brother's senior, and was a well-intentioned but foolish woman, who had on so many occasions evinced want of judgment, and had taken so many false steps in life, that those who knew her best had lost all confidence in her discretion, and consequently when she did happen to entertain a correct opinion, or to have a judicious purpose in

view, they often withheld from her the encouragement she deserved.

At five-and-twenty she had married a handsome "ne'er-do-well," of excellent abilities and lax principles; of indolent habits and sanguine temperament; a man "expecting an appointment," and one who was rather more a self-deceiver than the deluder of others;—always excepting his wife, who never to the day of his death knew him for what he was. He had been drawn to her side in the first instance by the magnetism of her ten thousand pounds, and her friends, suspecting this, opposed the marriage to the utmost of their ability; but having no real power over her, they effected a sort of compromise with their wishes—that is to say, they succeeded in having her fortune settled on herself and her children. She always considered this achievement as the triumphant test of her dear Percy's disinterestedness. To give him his due he did not realize the vulgar idea of a brute of a husband; the flexible character of his little Emma just suited him, her opinions and wishes revolving round his own as changefully and obediently as the earth-bound moon revolves round her lord. She laid the

blame of all the disappointments and disasters they encountered on ill-luck—hard destiny—secret enemies,—any circumstance in the world except the true causes.

Given two such characters and their surroundings, surely it would have required only a sum in arithmetic to indicate the average of the "hopes" which would yearly arise, with the disappointments which must ensue; the length of time which would elapse before the income of the "secured principal" would begin to be forestalled, and the gradual progression to loans at ruinous interest. Life insurance would then be effected, and the high road to ruin fairly entered upon. In truth the career of that wedded pair had shaped itself precisely as a "great arithmetician" of the sort I mean would have predicted; until it was cut short by the sudden death of Mr. Percy Farrell, at the age of thirty-five. Perhaps it is one of the compensations in human affairs that the species to which that individual belonged is not a long-lived one. He left two children—a daughter, Emily Clementina, and a son, Charles Augustus, familiarly and respectively called Millie and Charley. Also a really mourning widow, who for long refused to be

comforted, who was devoted to her children, but whose true encumbrances were debts—and those horrid life policies, the interest on which she had annually to pay, and by which not her children would benefit, but money-lenders and other creditors. For seven years Mr. Blake had been perpetually helping his sister out of one difficulty or another, not to mention that since her widowhood he had systematically paid the school expenses of his nephew Charley.

But with these proofs of his generosity, —and Mr. Blake had been truly generous —one bitter ingredient was ever mingled. Mother and son knew well that their benefactor had hated the dead, with that strong, even flow of hatred which often exists under a merely frigid manner. The mother knew it by a hundred acts of cold contumely, a hundred biting words of satirical scorn, a hundred glances of contempt—and even by that non-denial of the fact which amounted to its avowal. And her children had listened to her babbling and her wailing about "Uncle Compton's unkindness to dear papa," until half insensibly they had imbibed the sentiment that they had a father's wrongs to

avenge, instead of being grateful for a kinsman's bounty.

And yet Mrs. Farrell could plead to her brother for aid whenever she needed it. Indeed, she had taught herself that his assistance was a sort of right—"because he was so rich," according to her logical powers of reasoning; and the exertion of seeking his assistance she always considered as the performance of a duty to her children. Her present petition took something the shape of asking advice. Charley was now sixteen, and "what was to be done with him?" Would Mr. Blake recommend for him a University course, to render him by education fit for a learned profession; and would he assist his nephew forward in this path; or would he take him into his counting-house with the view of his acquiring mercantile knowledge? Some day the "dear boy must be master of five thousand pounds"—a very fair sum to be the foundation of a future fortune to be made by commerce—and in "her state of health, and borne down as she was by daily troubles," it was little likely he would have to wait many years for the money so tightly tied up until her death.—Meanwhile "her brother knew

how straitened were her means," et cetera, et cetera—and she drifted out into that sea of common-places so familiar to Mr. Blake that I am not sure that he did more than glance at the concluding paragraphs of that long crossed letter.

Yet he put it into the hands of his wife with a sort of glad confidence in her judgment on the affair. It seemed to him that his dear Clara must be the best possible adviser in all that concerned his sister, with the outlines of whose history she was already familiar. Now Clara's mental vision had neither a wide range nor a habit of upward looking; she was too apt to regard approvingly some little path of expediency that lay just at her feet, and thus it came to pass that she did not incline to her husband's incurring any further expense with regard to Charley's education, but, on the contrary, thought it a good idea that he should receive his nephew into his counting-house, paying him at first, she suggested, only a nominal salary, for of course he would be for a long time to come more plague than profit.

And thus Charley Farrell's career was decided on by his new aunt, with somewhat less consideration than perhaps she would

have bestowed on the selection of a dress; and while she sat down to answer Miss Hardy's letter, Mr. Blake prepared to address his sister. In five minutes he had completed a thorough business letter, which, scarcely covering two sides of note paper, was yet a condensation of various opinions he desired to express, and of all the promises he was inclined to make, and then—since Clara's more diffuse epistle was not half finished—he took a new pen as well as a new sheet of paper, and with purposed legibility wrote several lines, commencing, "My dearest little daughter."

Undemonstrative as Mr. Blake's ordinary manner was, he had a great fund of tenderness in his nature towards all really helpless and dependent creatures. Strange dogs knew this point of his character, and poked their noses into his hand; cats, half-demented by daily harshness and "hishing," would—provided they were *tête-à-tête*—purr and rub against his foot; even in his boyhood, animals not famous for their docility had given to him their pleased allegiance. It was a matter of course that a man of this description, instead of disliking children, should be really very

fond of the "little people;" and, moreover, he was fully aware of his partiality. As we have seen, he was indignant at the falsehood which had misled his young step-daughter, and it was in his heart to set her mind at rest on the subject. He, therefore, contradicted the falsehood explicitly and decidedly, and, without indulging in foolish phraseology, wrote fondly and affectionately. Ah! how happy those kind words would have made little Agnes had they been transmitted to her that day! I think they would even have helped towards her bodily cure as much as the soft west wind which at last was blowing; but if it was natural that the bride should look over her husband's shoulder, when she learned to whom he was writing, it was also natural that she should hinder the completion of such a letter. Hindered, in fact, it must be—and the means of hindrance were not too difficult to find.

"My dear Compton, I have said all that is necessary in my letter to Miss Hardy," exclaimed the lady; "and I assure you it is most mischievous to make a child feel herself of so much consequence, as you are doing."

"Dearest Clara, let me do as I like just

this once—the poor little thing has been ill, remember; and," he added, "unhappy."

"Do you suppose I am ignorant of her disposition?" and Mrs. Blake spoke as if the tears were springing; "surely you are not going to control me with regard to my own child—and thus early too!" and now the tears flowed copiously, and Mr. Blake sprang up to assuage them, upsetting the inkstand as he did so. Of course he yielded; it never seemed even to occur to him that it was his wife who was seeking to control him, not he her; that she was insisting he should not exercise the courtesy of replying to a letter he had received —because the writer of it was her child.

He yielded: nevertheless he did not destroy that unfinished letter, but huddled it up with other papers in his writing case and turned the key in the lock. I dare say he felt a degree of what would have been a full satisfaction if those words of kindness had been posted that evening; penning them had relieved his mind from its irritation on the subject of the lie, and as may easily be imagined, in a few days the memory of his annoyance almost faded away. Also he relied on the promise of his wife, that as soon as she

returned home she would—in her own discreet and experienced manner—impress on little Agnes a right understanding of Mr. Blake's wishes and feelings towards her. Meanwhile, sight-seeing and various incidents of travel helped to weaken any recollections which his wife desired to banish.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHILD'S QUESTION.

"A good child on the whole—
A meek and manageable child."
AURORA LEIGH.

WHERE is the exact line to be drawn between that which is trifling and puerile in a child's history, and the events which are life-important? Not easily can the question be answered; for the child's world is ever, more or less, a mystery to grown men and women; looked on by them from a distance, not breathed in by themselves; yet it is best seen by the mellowing lights of wide sympathy and personal recollections—recollections of emotions rather than of events. Change of position, loss or increase of fortune, death of kindred, may in reality influence a child's

character far less than some particular harsh word, or kind word; or than some comprehended magnanimity, or fully fathomed act of injustice. No matter how slight the occasion, so the fact be thorough of its kind. As the acorn dropped by a careless squirrel may enshrine the vital force of a forest king which shall reign when whole generations of grafted and planted garden shrubs may have withered away—so the precepts carefully instilled may have briefer life than the consequence of a chance word which fell into the young heart, and struck root there.

In treating of Agnes Bendoran's childhood I shall endeavour to be brief; and only to dwell upon the "acorns" which took root, and influenced her character.

It was the middle of April when Mr. and Mrs. Blake returned from their bridal tour, and settled in their new home in Curzon Street. In those days I think brides made more ceremony than they do at present in receiving congratulatory visits. Three days had been set apart for Mrs. Blake to be "at home," and they afforded opportunities for three distinct, elaborate, and ultra-fashionable "toilettes" on the part of the bride. Julie

was well content with her situation, and graciously undertook to suggest and superintend certain improvements in the costume of her mistress's daughter. By the way, the boxes and bundles already mentioned, which somebody, with horrid *gaucherie*, had placed in Mrs. Blake's dressing-room, were swept out of it as unceremoniously as if they had been so many dusty cobwebs. Mrs. Blake found herself well supplied with money, credit, and much material that she had brought from Paris; therefore, if it was necessary it was also easy to dress her little girl in correspondence with existing circumstances. She even presented her cousin Beta with a piece of French silk, that she might wear a dress "fit to be seen" on the reception days; it having been arranged she was to remain in Curzon Street till they were over.

To a very sensitive woman those "receptions" would have been extremely trying; for the larger proportion of Mr. Blake's friends were strangers to her, while she well knew that they must have some curiosity to see her, and would come, most probably, in a critical mood, knowing, as they did, that the marriage had been a hurried one, and calling it in their

hearts a great match for her. But she bore the ordeal bravely. She knew herself to be attractive in person, she knew she was clever, she knew she could fascinate if she pleased; she had sufficient tact to discover with what sort of people dignity would be effective, and with whom a more cordial courtesy should be assumed—and the aplomb of her fixed position gave her nerve and presence of mind to direct the whole artillery of her gifts and graces at will. People went away charmed and delighted, just as the bride intended should be the case, and as her husband was made well aware of by many a warm pressure of his hand, many an expressive face and heartfelt congratulation.

Nor was her influence of brief duration. Day after day fresh homage was offered at her shrine; sometimes in the shape of a delicate compliment addressed to the "luckiest of men," sometimes in a graceful attention to herself. Before many weeks had passed the poor music-teacher of the last winter had become the idol of a large and influential London circle. If anything could have rendered Mr. Blake more blindly in love with his wife than he was already, it was her

popularity. He was a man who liked to wear his jewel on his breast for people to admire, perhaps to envy him for possessing—not to shut it up in a casket.

Little Agnes caught some of the reflected rays of this popularity. Many people thought that to praise and pet her daughter was rendering the most graceful homage to the mother, and others were really interested in the delicate-looking child—usually so quiet and silent, but who listened to what her elders were saying with keen comprehension; as you might know by her changing cheek and darkening eye. Not that Mrs. Blake had any idea "of being bored with a child constantly at her heels"—her own phraseology when speaking familiarly to Miss Hardy—but Agnes was not yet wholly recovered from her illness; she was ordered air, without fatigue, and prohibited from entering on any course of study at present; thus it came to pass that she was often in the drawing-room, and was Mrs. Blake's usual companion in her carriage drives.

One day, however, Agnes chanced to be left at home and alone. The London season was drawing towards its close—it was the

Saturday of the last Chiswick fête, and Mr. and Mrs. Blake had joined a party to attend it. I verily believe it was the knowledge of this engagement brought Miss Hardy to Curzon Street.

In the "dark ages," as Mrs. Blake now called the days of her poverty, Agnes had grown so helpful a child, that there seemed nothing strange in her dispensing with the services of a nurse or governess; and when Jackson threw open the drawing-room door, and in a pleased voice announced "Miss Hardy has come to see you, miss," her solitude was broken most agreeably,—yet her solitude had not been dull, and it is no contradiction of terms to say—not lonely. It had been peopled with airy shapes, which to her were most real.

It was a perfect English summer day, and even in the heart of London the influence of the balmy breeze was felt, and the glory of the bright blue sky, softly shaded by a few fleecy clouds, was recognised. It was the weather which makes us happier we know not why. Agnes had nestled herself among the flowers which crowded the balcony, having brought thither her pet books and pictures.

The occasional roll of carriage-wheels, the splash and trickle of a watering-cart, and the distant murmur of a street-organ, were the only sounds that for the last half-hour had broken the silence, and, by the principle of association, woven themselves into her fairy dreamings. For Agnes revelled in fairy tales: out of them, or helped by them, she had unconsciously built for herself a palace of thought and fancy, into which, when not held down by the chains of some childish sorrow, she had the power of retreating at will. In that bright region she was warmed and rested; and it may be, taught, by the experience of a mind's palace, to build hereafter a soul's temple;—and from that region I must believe she returned laden with invisible treasures, as one who has walked through a grove of odorous shrubs brings back on his garments breathings of fragrance even to the stoniest roads. It was with one of her bright, glad smiles that she rose from her little stool among the geraniums, and threw herself into the arms of her cousin Beta.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as she danced and jumped by Miss Hardy's side, leading her at the same time to a comfortable easy chair near

the open window—"Oh! I am sure it was some good fairy that made you come here to-day—perhaps she turned a pumpkin into a carriage to bring you—that way," she added, picking up Miss Hardy's parasol, which had fallen to the ground, and waving it with mock seriousness, as if it had been a fairy wand.

"No, indeed," replied Miss Hardy smiling, "my carriage was a common London cab; and I came entirely out of my own head, as you say sometimes."

"Ah, well, then, a fairy sent mamma to Chiswick to-day, that I might have you all to myself; that's just the same thing."

"You look better, my child," said Miss Hardy, changing the conversation, "I hope you have now quite lost your cough."

"Yes, very nearly, but sometimes I cough in the night, and that disturbs mamma; so my room is going to be changed. After we come from the seaside, I am to sleep at the very top of the house, out of the way. Papa said he hoped I should lose my cough at the seaside, but mamma said she wanted my bedroom for a boudoir—so that settled it."

"In London, I think it is an advantage to sleep high up," observed Miss Hardy.

"Oh, yes! I shall like it much better, because then I can jump or sing, or do anything I like, without disturbing people. It is very nice to have a large house, and so many pretty things, with such beautiful pictures on the walls; do you know, Cousin Beta, I often wonder how mamma could possibly have lived in our old ugly little parlour."

"There was no help for it, my dear Agnes, she could not afford to pay for a larger or a prettier room."

"Yes—but"—and Agnes paused, as if incapable of exactly expressing her thoughts.

"What were you going to say, my dear?"

"Only—I mean, Cousin Beta, it seems so natural for mamma to be rich, and to have a carriage, and this nice house—that I sometimes fancy the other time was not real to her. Or do you think some fairy has given her magic fruit to eat, which has made her forget disagreeable things?"

"My child, there is no magic fruit, or Lethean stream, really to be found in the world. But tell me, Agnes, if there were, would you wish to eat or drink of it, and to forget past sorrows?"

Agnes paused a moment, and then replied,

somewhat seriously, "No, I would rather remember everything."

"You are right, my darling," returned Miss Hardy, drawing the child towards her affectionately; "right, because, although there is no water of oblivion to be found, something a great deal more precious may be distilled from the recollections of suffering. Good and wise people know this, and they call it experience. Do you at all understand me, my dear child?"

"I think I do. I think what you say is what I mean, and that I understand what I mean better because you have put it into words. Children who have always had rich parents cannot know all the things I know, though they may have learned a great deal more French, and history, and geography."

"When you are much older, I believe you will understand the difference between Wisdom and Knowledge; but for the present, dear Agnes, it is enough if you teach yourself to be grateful for the blessings by which you are surrounded, and to be meek and patient under little sorrows, knowing that they are permitted for some wise end."

"I am grateful, Cousin Beta, and I often try to thank God for his goodness to us.

And I do love my new papa, really I do;—don't you think he is very good and kind?"

"Very—very."

"Only—only," and now poor Agnes hesitated, not from want of words, but because her infirmity was upon her, arising as it often did when her feelings were deeply stirred. The flushed cheek, the finger at her lip betrayed how much she suffered; and it was some minutes before she was able to proceed intelligibly. At last she said, "Only I am so sorry he dislikes children; and mamma has frightened me about him: she says something dreadful would happen if I ever were to talk to him about his not liking children—and do you know, Cousin Beta, she was very angry with me about writing that little letter."

"But this is a trouble of the past, my dear; whatever Mr. Blake's inclination about young folks in general may be, I am sure he loves you."

"And you think so really? I am so glad, now I shall try not to be frightened of him, and yet I am not sure that I can help it."

"Try, dear Agnes. Fear to do wrong, but endeavour to have no other fear in the world."

"I know that is what you have often told me, and I will try not to dread people being cross—not that papa has ever been cross to me yet."

Miss Hardy was wise enough to change the conversation, as she knew only too well whose was the one undisciplined temper that so often pained and perplexed the little girl's sense of justice.

Two persons who really love each other, whatever the difference of age and position, rarely weary of a *tête-à-tête*, and Miss Hardy threw aside her bonnet, and in due time found herself partaking of Agnes's early tea. I believe Jackson was both pleased and amused at the little girl's earnest request that she might have the urn and preside herself at the tea-table. It was just as they were finishing the sociable meal, and fully an hour earlier than Mrs. Blake had ordered dinner, that she and her husband returned home.

"Ah, Elizabeth, how do you do?" exclaimed the lady, entering the room with an air of hurry and bustle; then turning to Jackson, she added, "Tell Cook to let us have dinner in a quarter of an hour, if possible," and the

well-trained Jackson made a gesture of obedience and departed.

Mrs. Blake threw herself on the sofa, as if to snatch two minutes' rest, while she continued—"We are going to the Opera to-night, very unexpectedly, and I must send for Isidore to dress my hair—Julie is a good soul, but she made quite a fright of me yesterday. Agnes, ring the bell, I must inquire if Julie has come home; I gave her permission to go out this afternoon—I never will do so in the season again—one always repents that sort of thing."

Miss Hardy suggested that there was ample time to dine and dress for the Opera, seeing that it was only six o'clock; and volunteered to assist at her cousin's toilette should Julie not return home in time.

"My dear Beta, you are very good, but I should not think of such a thing."

Fortunately Julie returned at that very moment, and made her appearance accordingly.

"Don't take off your bonnet," said her mistress, "I want you to get into a cab and drive as fast as possible to Isidore; tell him he must come to me in half an hour, or at any

rate send one of his best hands. Then, while we are at dinner, get my things ready. I shall wear the blue brocade, and don't forget any of its belongings, and the azalia wreath, and my pearls. There, make haste;" and now, having put affairs in train, she was able to speak to Miss Hardy a little more at leisure. Meanwhile, Mr. Blake had entered the drawing room, given the visitor a friendly greeting, and Agnes a paternal kiss, and a playful pat on the cheek.

"I was introduced to Mrs. Sutton at the gardens," exclaimed Mrs. Blake, after a short pause, and speaking with that air of assumed nonchalance which has more often betrayed than concealed a secret satisfaction, "and she has offered us seats in her box to-night; it will be a great treat—Grisi in Norma."

"You heard that opera last week, I think?" said Miss Hardy.

"Yes, and I shall enjoy it all the more for knowing it so thoroughly;" and Mrs. Blake hummed a few bars of the Casta Diva.

But now dinner was announced, of which Miss Hardy declined partaking; and, as she proposed leaving shortly, she made her adieux to Mr. and Mrs. Blake.

"Cousin Beta," exclaimed Agnes, as she helped Miss Hardy to put on her mantle, "how pleased mamma seems! I wonder who Mrs. Sutton is, and why she asked mamma to go to the Opera. Do you know?"

"Indeed I do not," replied Miss Hardy; and she added, with a smile, "why, Agnes, how curious you are!"

"Oh, no; but yet—am I though?"

"Remember Fatima."

"Ah, but I have not been forbidden to know who that lady is, or why she invited mamma to go to the Opera; and asking a question of you is not like mean peeping, is it, Cousin Beta?"

"Certainly not."

"Then that makes all the difference. I despise Fatima as much as you do; but Blue-Beard is a horrid story, and I don't believe it is true. I like to read about good and beautiful people, not wicked ones, don't you?"

"Yes, dear child, I do, and let us try to imitate what we so much admire. Now, as beauty is not in our own power, suppose you and I try to be good."

"Oh, you are good already, without any trying."

"Nay, nay; every one needs a great deal—"

"I shall stop you with kisses if you say you are not good."

"A great deal, Agnes—you—my love, you're crushing my bonnet to pieces—a great deal of—of trying to be good."

CHAPTER V.

A FAMILY PARTY.

"To write some earnest verse or line,
Which, seeking not the praise of art,
Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
In the untutored heart."

LOWELL.

FOR some little time past a stern necessity had been pressing on Clara Blake, the coming event casting a dark shadow on her path, and trying her temper considerably whenever she thought of the affair. Yet there was no help for it, since Mr. Blake had positively decided that they must have a family dinner party and entertain his sister, who, with her daughter, had come to London to install Charley into his new position. Mrs. Blake acknowledged that it was a thing which had to be done, but she put it off as long as possi-

ble—at any rate, till town was thinning, and she had fewer pleasant engagements. To consent to be *ennuyéd* for four or five hours by a tiresome woman, and the sort of persons who must be invited to meet her, was a stretch of amiability which she secretly hoped would not often be demanded of her.

As for inviting any of her charming new acquaintances, that was out of the question; but Miss Hardy, who was always ladylike and agreeable, would be an available acquisition; and to be sure it was a good opportunity of inviting the Penningtons.

The worthy Penningtons! whose worth Mr. Blake had always appreciated, however it might have been undervalued by his wife since her marriage. Mr. Pennington had been for years the solicitor and confidential adviser of Mr. Blake on the many occasions when, as a man of business and a man of fortune, knotty points in his affairs had required legal untwisting; and, as has before been said, it was at this friend's house Mr. Blake had first met his wife.

In the days of her struggling widowhood she had been glad, very glad, to know so kind and hospitable a family. Then she had been

lavish in her praise of Mrs. Pennington's taste, and house decorations, and the arrangement of her little drawing-room; and in all sincerity she had called the low pony chaise a truly covetable vehicle. Now she was severe on suburban cottages that were called "villas;" on prim gardens measured out in a length, "like so many yards of ribbon;" on the cockney taste for rosewood furniture, with a round table set in the middle of the room strewn with Keepsakes and other gilded annuals—"looking like goods set out on a counter for sale." Not that in her weak witticisms she mentioned the Penningtons by name; but, when this sort of discourse took place in Miss Hardy's hearing, that family were always recalled to her mind, and she felt a pang—a spasm of indescribable regret that her cousin should thus chatter. Probably Mrs. Blake was more cautious in her husband's presence, for already she understood a few of his prejudices, and one was an extreme dislike to the use of ridicule at the expense of right feeling.

The appointed day arrived, it being the Tuesday following the Chiswick *fête*. Having determined to go through the infliction,

the hostess resolved to be amiable about it—and after all she discovered there was some pleasure to be found in patronizing. She desired to look well—she always so desired—but under the circumstances she would avoid a style of dress either showy or splendid. So she wore Indian muslin, and toned its simplicity by a brilliant ribbon, and some chaste but precious jewelry.

Miss Hardy's was the first arrival, and she naturally inquired how her cousin had enjoyed the Opera?

"Oh, of course, immensely," returned Clara, "but I was disappointed in one respect; Mrs. Sutton left before ten o'clock, pleading that she never kept her servants up late on a Saturday night. She is a charming person, and was most kind and civil, and to-day she called upon me and brought her daughter, a little girl about nine years old. Of course I sent for Agnes, and it was quite curious to see how the two children took to each other. However, as the Suttons are going into the country directly Parliament is prorogued, and we are off to Brighton shortly, I am afraid I shall see very little more of them this season."

At this moment Mrs. Farrell, with her son

and daughter, was announced. And while they are being kindly received by host and hostess, and introduced to Miss Hardy, their pen-and-ink portraits must be sketched.

Mrs. Farrell was about the middle height, neither stout nor thin; and had she possessed a little more strength of character, she might have been graceful. As it was, her weakness and indecision were betrayed not only by a low, broken, and hesitating manner of speaking, but by an unsteadiness of gait that rendered her walk a shuffle. Her features were tolerably regular, and she looked none the worse for her dark hair being thickly streaked with white. Her eyes were so little remarkable that few persons ever noticed their colour. She wore a plain, gray dress of some cheap material—for she had long passed through her period of personal vanity, and besides had but small means to expend on finery. The best thing she possessed, and which she now wore, was a handsome mourning brooch, containing some of her dead husband's hair.

Her daughter presented a great contrast to herself; shorter and stouter, she was yet much less awkward, and there was even a piquancy in her quick movements that helped

her bright eyes to tell you that she was neither foolish nor idle. But she was not pretty; those bright eyes and a set of white even teeth were the only good features of which she could boast, and her rosy cheeks, while they proclaimed health, did not make her round face, with its eccentric nose, the less plebeian. Those eyes that always met yours without drooping, had an expression of truth and honesty, and through them there cropped out the family likeness to her uncle. Millie was nearly eighteen, though she looked younger. Her education had been miserably neglected; but she knew it, and by some admirable mental process had arrived at the conviction that she was excessively ignorant. Her opportunities for improvement were few, but she was always on the watch to take advantage of them. She even spoke her own language incorrectly, and I think, if any kind competent soul had devoted a leisure hour or two to clearing up a few grammatical subtleties that had always puzzled her, the act of philanthropy would have proved its own reward.

Millie was very ill-dressed. She, like the hostess, wore white muslin, but it was coarse, and had been badly washed, and thus it had

acquired a dingy bluish shade. So her dress contrasted with rather than resembled that of Mrs. Blake. Her sash was excessively ugly—and her hair, though remarkably smooth and well-kept, was arranged in a prim, unbecoming manner. Altogether, it was evident that taste in dress was not a strong point in Millie's character; nevertheless the utter want of conceit and pretence redeemed her from vulgarity. Humble and modest, truthful, good-hearted, and good-tempered, Millie could never be vulgar.

Mr. Charles Augustus Farrell would not by a stranger have been taken for her brother. He was a tall, handsome youth, and though the younger, looked like his sister's senior. Being his mother's darling, for him all possible sacrifices had been made; and to do him justice, he was what the world calls a well-educated and gentlemanly-mannered young man. He had very good abilities, a fact of which he was aware, and which was duly impressed upon the minds of his mother and sister. Indeed, he tyrannised over them and their opinions in private; but he had a natural sort of *savoir faire* which prevented him from assuming an offensive manner in society.

Still his egotism did occasionally, and in an unintentional manner, creep out; especially in the habit which he had acquired of emphasizing the first personal pronoun. If the thing to be communicated were no more important than the method of his caligraphy, Charley would say, "*I* use a steel pen," or he would eulogize the denizens of Brunswick Hall Academy, thus, "My schoolfellows were the best cricketers in the county." It is astonishing what weight was sometimes given to his words by this unconscious manner; that is to say, when the hearers were those modest souls who walk through the world, taking people at their own valuation.

And now the Penningtons arrived—papa and mamma, and blooming daughters; the ladies gaily dressed, and with joyous countenances that seemed to correspond with their rustling and fluttering attire. Mrs. Blake was inwardly a little discomposed by their demonstrative cordiality, and rejoiced that two gentlemen, distant family connections of Mr. Blake, arrived after, instead of preceding this fussy family.

The party was now complete—a dozen in all—that pleasant number for a sociable

friendly dinner. The party having been made up, in a great measure, for Mrs. Farrell, she found herself treated with decided consideration—and was a little put out by it. Placed between Mr. Pennington and Mr. Fairley, a sort of half second-cousin, she felt relieved when the latter ceased addressing her, and devoted himself to the pretty Lucy Pennington on his left, and afterwards she enjoyed her dinner just in proportion as Mr. Pennington was engaged in assisting Mrs. Blake in the duties of hostess. The remaining guests were arranged appropriately and satisfactorily, and were on the whole in the humour to be pleased. Charley felt himself, for once in his life, in his right place—that of a young gentleman in good society; Millie was happy in listening to what people so much cleverer than herself said, and in observing what they did.

When strangers, or people but slightly acquainted, meet, to talk on general affairs or public amusements is the natural method of "breaking the ice," and so setting free the babbling stream of conversation. It was almost a matter of course that the visit to the Opera on the preceding Saturday should be

mentioned. "It was the greatest treat I ever had in my life," said Mrs. Blake—"Grisi was magnificent. I wish, Lucy, I had a box of my own, I would take you to hear Norma—but you must coax your papa into engaging one."

"Dear Mrs. Blake," replied Lucy Pennington, "will you try to persuade him? You used to tell Fanny and me that hearing good music was a sort of lesson."

Mrs. Blake slightly bit her lip, and did not commence her persuasions quite so promptly as she might have done. It flashed upon poor Lucy Pennington that she had made a mistake by alluding ever so distantly to the days when the young widow used to count "one, two, three" by the side of her piano. She grew red, answered some observation of Mr. Fairley's wide of the mark, and felt very much inclined to cry. Meanwhile Mrs. Blake had rallied from her momentary annoyance, and in the reaction rattled a little more perhaps than she might otherwise have done.

"Now, Mr. Pennington," she exclaimed, "you must engage a box one night next week, or Grisi and Mario will both be gone—and take my advice, don't be generous and offer

seats to other people, so as to crowd yourselves. Really, if I had a box of my own, I believe, after all, I should be very selfish; I am sure, at any rate, I should not be half as liberal as Mrs. Sutton is. It is a great sacrifice to be crowded, and to give up the best seat from politeness."

"Or kindness to those who go seldom," *thought* Miss Hardy.

"Sutton—Sutton—Mrs. Sutton?" observed Dr. Bryant, interrogatively. Dr. Bryant, who was seated on the right of Mrs. Blake, was the other distant relation, a middle-aged bachelor and dilettante in art and literature—a listener, admirer, disciple in certain "sets"—a Sir Oracle in others. Some few years previously he had acquired the right of adding D.C.L. to his signature, and this handle to his name gave him, as he himself observed, a "place." Ever afterwards he was an authority on the subject of "precedence;"—knew the printed tables by heart, and had all the by-laws at his fingers' ends. It was a matter of regret to him that his cousin Blake, so substantial a man, in more senses than one, could only come into a room with riff-raff—had literally no "place" in the world—Dr. Bryant

had been one of the very few who—before seeing the lady—had approved of Mr. Blake's choice of a wife. What did it signify that she was poor, and in her poverty had taught music? She was an officer's widow, and, as he understood, the great-grand-daughter of a law lord; yes, of a Lord Chancellor; she had her place in the world—she took precedence, no doubt, of half the money-grubbers who employed her—meeting her with every inclination to like her well, she had so improved the occasion that he had long ago avowed himself her devoted servant. She was not ungrateful now, and answered his implied interrogation by saying—

"Mrs. Sutton, of Sutton Court, the member's wife; do you know them?"

"Not personally—I have not that honour—but, of course, by repute;—perhaps, indeed, I know more of that family than most people. You see literary people hear everything—they know something about everybody."

"I suppose so."

But now Mr. Pennington joined in the conversation—"Sutton, the member—that means Sutton, the banker, the modern Crœsus,—who is legislator, financier, philanthropist—I know

not what. The man who has declined a baronetcy, though twice pressed upon him."

"Sir," returned Dr. Bryant, "he has refused a peerage, I know it from the best authority. Extraordinary conduct, is it not? The one craze of a great mind. Why, sir, he might have taken precedence at the levée of those very men who bully him in the House night after night. I should think his wife must be a modern Griselda, if she is patient under the circumstances."

"I do not think she is at all a Griselda," said the hostess, laughing. "Mrs. Sutton strikes me as having a great deal of character and decision; though I do not mean to say that she is what is called a high-spirited woman."

"Perhaps she and her husband think alike on the subject of titles," observed Mr. Blake, "and thus her Griselda or non-Griselda temper is not tried."

"Impossible," returned his learned cousin, "for only yesterday I heard a mad-doctor declare that he never knew two insane folks have a craze on the same subject at the same time. Hence the facility with which he manages his establishment. That sort of

rebels against reason never combine. Well, if not an absolute Griselda, Mrs. Sutton is an extremely amiable woman, that I happen to know on the best authority."

"I can well believe it," replied Mrs. Blake, "notwithstanding that *soupçon* of decision which tells you she is accustomed to authority, and bows not beneath her burthen."

"I will tell you how I have heard so much of the Suttons. A friend of mine is the editor of a certain magazine which shall be nameless, he was the first to recognise the literary merit of a certain noble poetess—to insert her verses in his pages, and make them known. She was intensely grateful—as poets always are for praise implied or uttered—and when this high-born Sappho was visiting at Sutton Court, my friend found himself included in the invitations to a set of literary people who were entertained there for some days. He always believed that he was invited to please the poetess—for she and Mrs. Sutton are like sisters. Indeed her new volume is dedicated to Mrs. Sutton, in the warmest terms."

"I am sure you mean Lady Isabella Clinton, who writes so beautifully," exclaimed Fanny

Pennington with genuine enthusiasm. "Oh, pray, Dr. Bryant, tell me everything you know about her!"

"Ah! young lady," returned the Doctor, "so you are an admirer of poetry, I see, and indulge in hero-worship. Well, personally, I have no knowledge of the Lady Isabella, but I hear that, though not handsome, she is *spirituelle* and charming, no longer quite young, and yet hardly enough advanced to be called *passée*."

"Dr. Bryant, do tell me, is it true that she once attempted to drown herself?" pursued Fanny Pennington, looking at the Doctor with all the seriousness of an initiate consulting an oracle."

"That is an abominable slander, I assure you; Lady Isabella is very near-sighted, yet indulges in the bad habit of reading at all likely and unlikely times. One day she was sauntering in her uncle's grounds, with a book close to her face, and taking a wrong turn in the shrubbery, she marched right into a fish-pond, her foot slipping in the mud so that she involuntarily indulged in a cold bath. A gardener helped her out, and she lost a

shoe,—that's the true story on which the vile fabrication was founded."

"I am so glad," cried Fanny Pennington, "so very glad. Indeed, I never could believe that she was so wicked. How could people invent such a falsehood?"

"Ah! thereby hangs a tale."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it was just at that time that 'she had a disappointment of the heart—at least so people declare—and they said that was the reason she attempted suicide. The fact is, she took to writing poetry instead of killing herself—a much wiser plan."

"And such beautiful poetry," pursued the young lady. "I think the lines 'To a Soldier's Orphan Daughter,' the most exquisite verses that ever were written—don't you, Dr. Bryant?"

"Ahem!—well—at this moment I don't remember that poem precisely—but, my fair enthusiast, I will read it on your recommendation."

"Oh! pray do—and, Dr. Bryant, could you—could you—could you procure me Lady Isabella's autograph?—I should be so proud of it."

"I am sure I could—and I should be proud," added the Doctor, with a bow and a smile, "of making proud so fair an admirer of the Muses, and of giving her pleasure."

The unsophisticated Fanny, though bold enough to display her poetic enthusiasm, was confused by a compliment, feeble and commonplace as it was—and blushing as she said, "Thank you very much," she suffered Lady Isabella's name to drop.

Miss Hardy seized the opportunity of starting another subject of conversation. She had observed that Mrs. Blake was twisting her bracelets round and round her arm in a nervous, unconscious manner, and was looking down on her plate instead of regarding her guests. Cousin Beta knew that the name of Lady Isabella Clinton was, generally speaking, the last in the world which it was desirable to mention in Clara's presence, and felt a tender pity for her present pain. Even at the risk of getting out of her depth, or being thought "blue," she suddenly plunged into politics, by asking Dr. Bryant if he had read a certain *Times* leader of that day. She was rewarded by a grateful look from Clara.

This straw being thrown up, it served to

show that the wind blew from various quarters. The gentlemen agreed and differed just sufficiently to make the conversation animated and instructive. Millie listened with greedy ears, her bright eyes growing still brighter, as if with awakened feeling and intelligence.

Then came the dessert, and it being a family-party, little Agnes entered at the same moment as the claret. Self-reliant, yet not self-conscious, Agnes was never forward and never shy, and fresh from Julie's tasteful fingers, she looked just now a thorough little lady. She walked round the table with a greeting for everyone, and as she stood for a minute by her mother's side, Dr. Bryant gazed on her with marked approbation. "I congratulate you, my dear madam," he exclaimed, "on so patrician a little damsel."

But at that moment the patrician little damsel—greatly puzzled at the fine phrase applied to her—was beckoned to the bottom of the table, where a seat was placed for her between the host and Miss Hardy.

Soon the ladies withdrew, and tolerably soon the gentlemen followed them. Fanny Pennington took advantage of the ladies' half-

hour to resume the subject of Lady Isabella Clinton's poetry; and conversing *sotto voce* with Miss Hardy about the new volume, her good memory enabled her to quote some stanzas from it. They were far from being the best in the volume, but her choice was curious, as exemplifying that prevision of life which enables the imagination of some young people to pierce to the truths they cannot know by experience. The poem the young girl recited was entitled

THE FOUR CROWNS.

"There is a time—if but a day—
We wear a Crown of Roses;—
Or drear the lot of them whose May
No birthright wealth discloses,
To form a crown in Youth's bright morn,
When all the sunbeams level
So daze our eyes, we rarely see
Life's meshes to unravel;
Or note how far the shadows stretch,
To limn our idlest gesture—
Not yet the day when shadows press
About us like a vesture.

There is a time—the Few achieve
Great deeds, that win for guerdon
A Crown which lookers-on believe
Too fair to be a burden.

But oh! 'tis well the laurel hides
The scars got in the winning;
Were Fame's rough pathway early proved,
Such deeds might halt beginning—
So brave 'twould be to do and dare,
And strive where duty beckon'd,
If Prescience shew'd earth's poor rewards
Its disappointments reckon'd!

There is a crown of flaming gems,
With varied starry stories,—
For monarchs' beaming diadems
Are made of separate glories,
And should be bound in perfect round,
By which the gems are holden,
And set each at its proper place,
In truth's pure ore, the golden.
But gold and gems weigh heavily,
However they be shining—
And often beneath robes of state
A human heart is pining.

One King—yea, One King's Son there was,
Who had for coronation
Not gold, nor gems, nor laurel leaves,
Nor roses' soft oblation;—
But lancet thorns drew sacred blood,
In rosy, ruby measure,
Each drop redeeming ruin'd souls,
And worth a planet's treasure!
And from each pointed Thorn still beams
A light so lustrous glowing,
It pierces up to Heaven's courts,
As if the stair-way showing!

Oh, sister hearts, that oft repine
When Youth's sweet roses perish,
And think the laurel crown is one
It would be just to cherish,—
Who look with envy half confess'd
On all the world's high places—
Make question of your better selves,
And bow your woman faces!
If you've been piercéd near the heart—
Your brows felt thorny wounding—
Rejoice!—and let your royal hymn
Of kinship now be sounding!"

Afterwards, Mrs. Blake's fine playing and the Misses Pennington's agreeable singing helped to pass away the short evening; but Dr. Bryant found time again to notice Agnes —begged for her the grace of half-an-hour's extra "sitting up"—and seemed pleased to talk with Miss Hardy about her. *Sotto voce* he inquired if she inherited her mother's taste for music.

"I scarcely know what to say on the subject," replied Miss Hardy. "She likes music, and has recently begun to study it; but I think her most decided talent is for drawing and painting. This is a sketch of hers," she continued, taking a little drawing from a portfolio on the table, "roughly done, as you will

perceive, but I think full of promise, when we consider her age."

"Wonderful! why, there is absolute genius here. But she has race, and that, madam, accounts for everything of this sort. Some of the great Italian painters belonged to great families."

"And some," returned the lady with a smile, "were of obscure origin. I think there is no very exact rule on the subject."

"Race, madam, depend upon it, race is everything."

"Something, I grant; but, with all due deference, Doctor, I think not everything. The well-born, we may suppose, as a natural corollary of their birth, receive many advantages of early training and instruction, which place them on a comparatively high platform early in life, and we know the first steps of an upward career are always the hardest to mount."

"So hard," said Mr. Fairley, joining in the conversation, "that the wit must indeed be keen which can cut its bright way through all the hard circumstances of lowly origin, toil, and poverty."

"This is a subject, my dear Fairley," said

the Doctor, "on which you and I have often differed. Given the genius, I believe it will force its way through all opposing obstacles."

"Then you contradict yourself when you lay so much stress on birth."

"Not at all. Noble families often fall in point of worldly position; and if the pedigree of famous low-born geniuses could be traced, I believe you would find they had good blood in their veins."

"Very likely; because in reality the mass of English people—we will argue from our own country for the sake of simplifying the question—must be pretty closely related to one another. A single *mesalliance* in a family does wonders in consanguinizing the future generations. Just consider—skipping back two or three generations—"

"Oh, stop," said Dr. Bryant, putting his hands to his ears; "whatever your arguments may be, I still maintain that talent of all sorts finds its own level sooner or later."

"And I that it should be our aim to help it to find its level, by giving it education and training."

"Not in the fine arts—not in the fine arts," pursued the Doctor; "you destroy originality

by over-teaching; let genius study nature and develop itself freely. My advice is, that this little lady, who is evidently an artist born, should remain unspoiled by teachers, and be allowed to develop her own original style."

"On the contrary," exclaimed Mr. Fairley, with enthusiasm, "my advice is that she should receive early and continuously the very best instruction that can be procured for her; taking extra lessons from nature and her own soul—as, if she have genius she will assuredly do—all the while. But I perceive our hostess is listening to us, and I fear we must seem rather impertinent."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Blake; "I feel obliged to you, and greatly interested in what you say."

But her husband had also been listening, and knowing that when his two relatives got on certain subjects they differed always, and extremely, he sought to make the conversation less serious and earnest.

"Suppose we consult the little personage chiefly concerned," cried he, drawing the little girl to his side. "Agnes, would you like to take lessons in painting or not?"

"I should like to learn—learn—learn as

much about painting and drawing as ever I could," was the prompt and emphasised answer of the child.

"There, Doctor, is a decision against you, I am afraid," said Mr. Blake; "though, perhaps, you would appeal against such a judge."

"Ah, she will see differently when she loses her humility."

"May that never be," whispered Mr. Fairley to Miss Hardy.

"Amen," said the lady.

"Her childish words," continued Mr. Fairley, "seem to me that cry for help which, if our ears were more finely attuned, would vibrate upon us daily."

"You believe in 'mute inglorious Miltons' dying without sign for want of that help?" said Miss Hardy, interrogatively.

"I do."

"So do I."

"And that 'Circumstance' is a cruel 'miscreator?'"

"Yes."

"And that true genius would never extract opiates from leisure and learning?"

"Never," replied the lady.

"If I were a pagan," said Mr. Fairley, after

a moment's pause, "I would dedicate a temple to the God of Common Sense."

"And I," returned Miss Hardy, "would bring offerings to its altar."

CHAPTER VI.

GAIN AND LOSS.

"In the pleasant orchard closes,
'God bless all our gains, say we;'
But 'may God bless all our losses,'
Better suits with our degree."
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

AFTER all, the family party had proved a less *triste* affair than the hostess had expected. It is true she felt more than ever assured it was impossible to "make anything" of Mrs. Farrell, whom she ticketed at once in her mind—"prosy when not idealess;" but she positively liked Charley, and thought Millie just the sort of girl to be useful in half a hundred ways. It is to be suspected that Millie's admiration of her new aunt's beauty, grace, and accomplishments had made itself sufficiently apparent without bursting into words.

Chiefly, however, was that family-party memorable to Clara as having been the occasion of a great mental relief; relief from a thought which had lain for years on her mind like a dull pain, for selfish and worldly as Mrs. Blake was, capable of much petty deception and mean injustice, she shrank like a very Pharisee from the thought or contemplation of a great scandalous crime.

"You may imagine, Beta," she exclaimed, the next time the cousins were together; "you may imagine what a satisfaction it was to me to hear the true version of that stupid suicide-story. Not that poor George ever believed himself to be the cause, even if the story had been true; I must do him that justice—he was never vain on the subject of poor Lady Isabella. On the contrary, he always maintained that she cared as little for him as he did for her, and that his meeting with me was the happiest thing for all parties, as it prevented a horrible *mariage de convenance* which would have been sure to result in misery. However, I was truly thankful to you for changing the subject; I thought they would never have done with it."

"I saw that it had recalled by-gone times,"

said Miss Hardy; "but as it appears that Lady Isabella is becoming famous, I fancy, my dear Clara, that her name may frequently arise in society."

"I shall not mind it now. Not that I believe she was as indifferent to poor George as he wished to think; but since I could recover from the wretchedness of his loss so as to marry again, and—and be as happy as I am, I am sure she ought to be heart-whole by this time: and I dare say she is; especially as the drowning-story is such a ridiculous fabrication. If I should visit Mrs. Sutton, I suppose I should be likely to meet Lady Isabella—rather disagreeable at first, though, of course, if she kept her own counsel I should keep mine; and it seems to me that poor George was not identified as her runaway lover, or Dr. Bryant would never have mentioned her in my presence in the way he did the other day."

"Probably, beyond the circle of her inti mates, the story is imperfectly known. However," continued Miss Hardy, "I do not think you will meet Lady Isabella just at present either at Sutton Court or in London society. Dr. Bryant has sent Fanny Pennington the

promised autograph; in her glee at the precious possession she showed it to me yesterday, and I found it to consist of a recent letter from Lady Isabella to her publisher, in which she announced her intention of quitting England immediately; and if she carries out her pilgrim plans in Italy and elsewhere, her tour will be a lengthened one."

"So much the better; it is odd, though, that she should be Mrs. Sutton's particular friend, and that Mrs. Sutton should have made a point of being civil to me. Quite curious I call it. But, Beta," said Mrs. Blake, after a moment's pause, "I must not forget what I wanted to say; I hope you will spend a week or two with us while we are at Brighton. If you will fix your own time I will take care to keep a room disengaged for you; I suppose we shall have heaps of visitors."

"You are very kind; but any time would suit me."

"Well, we will arrange it soon. Do you know I am thinking of our taking Millie Farrell with us; I proposed the plan to Compton this morning, and he made no objection."

"He seems always hospitable and kind."

"Yes, and it will be an advantage to his

niece, at the same time that she will be able to take Agnes a good deal off my hands; that stupid stammer does so irritate me. Really I must have a governess for the child when we return to town, or else send her to school; Julie is very good-tempered, and often keeps her out of my way; still she is too much for me, especially under present circumstances, and Compton knows that, and is most anxious that I should not be fatigued with her."

"Miss Farrell seems a kind-hearted girl," observed Miss Hardy, "and it will be very amiable of her if she fulfils the duty of nursery-governess—which seems what you wish—while she is your visitor."

"Oh, as to that, my dear Beta, I have no scruple. You cannot imagine how much my husband has had to do for the whole family. I believe, indeed, he is going to take his sister's affairs entirely into his own hands, and make her a yearly allowance, just enough for her and her daughter to live on decently. Indeed, this will be the more economical plan in the end; as it is, he is always being called on for assistance, whereas, if her income were well-managed, and liabilities paid off by degrees, things might come round."

Mrs. Blake's plans for the autumn were carried out with some slight modifications. Her health did not quite permit the gay visiting, and the reception of much company; so that she entertained fewer guests than had at first been proposed, while, on the other hand, Miss Hardy prolonged her visit by several weeks. Millie Farrell had accepted her aunt's invitation with absolute delight, and out of the warm gratitude of her fresh nature was pleased to find herself of use. Mrs. Blake had a way of leading those about her to fulfil her wishes without their always being conscious of guidance or direction; and thus it very soon happened that Millie fell into those daily habits which her hostess most desired. Besides, it was generally understood throughout the household that just now Mrs. Blake must neither be fatigued nor contradicted; and even little Agnes vaguely comprehended that some day she was to have a baby-brother or sister, and with her preconceived idea that children occasioned so much trouble, it seemed quite natural to her young mind that preparations for the expected little stranger should occupy her mamma's chief attention, and even engross a little of Cousin Beta's time also.

Meanwhile, the companionship between Millie Farrell and the little girl had in it something uncommon. Millie was so conscientious and so humble that she felt terrified at the idea of misinstructing her young charge, and when, as they sat on the beach or rambled inland together, Agnes asked some childish question on a matter of fact which Millie could not answer, the latter owned her ignorance, but immediately sought to find out the desired information. Often had the folks at the circulating library to mount their steps and draw from some dusty recess old books of history or biography, to which Millie had been led solely by their titles, suggestive of the information she needed; frequent were her disappointments, and admirable was her perseverance, but usually her greatest reward came in an unexpected fashion. The queer old book would start her mind off on some fresh track of inquiry, which she pursued without any definite idea of whither it was leading, solely from the rich joy the acquisition of knowledge afforded to her nature. For Millie was blessed with a vigorous intellect, which hitherto had been starved and cramped rather than misdirected, and with a robust and thoroughly

healthy bodily frame to be its servant. No wonder that reading and study appeared to her the chief of sublunary pleasures, and that with a perfectly unimpaired mental digestion she sought substantial mental aliment rather than the *vol-au-vents* of light literature. Her choice of reading was fortunate for all parties; she never kept any other member of the family waiting for the third volume of the last new novel, and the librarian was civil and obliging, seeing that the most devouring reader who claimed the benefit of Mr. Blake's family subscription, occupied herself with just the books that were never asked for by anyone else.

And what were the sentiments of little Agnes towards her new companion? Governesses who profess encyclopedian information and Popish infallibity might be surprised to hear that Millie Farrell very soon inspired her little friend with affectionate trust and liking, and very sincere respect. Agnes felt that she was never deceived or trifled with, while Millie's humility and amiability prevented her from awakening either awe or fear in the child's mind. Thus the sensitive Agnes, so little comprehended by common observers,

showed herself involuntarily to Millie—who half unconsciously received thereby a lesson in child nature. True, she thought Agnes a wonderful child, not only endowed with finer feelings and more strange fancies and delicate comprehension of the beautiful than she herself possessed, but than she had hitherto remarked in any individual; but the day arrived, and that not tardily, when Millie knew that the student of human nature takes his first lesson from strongly defined characters—and can discover ever after the same lines, however feebly reproduced in punier models.

As the autumn days shortened there was necessarily more in-door occupation for all parties, and on rainy mornings Millie fell into the habit of keeping school hours with Agnes; and it happened that in superintending the grammar exercises of her little charge, she suddenly mastered and disentangled those difficulties in our language which in her less matured years had sorely perplexed her. Somehow it was soon afterwards discovered that the homely, unaccomplished Millie was a ready and an admirable letter-writer.

But the autumn days gave place to winter ones; and the sojourn at Brighton came to

an end, Mrs. Blake returning to Curzon Street a few weeks before Christmas.

And now Millie Farrell was introduced to the new home which had been provided for herself, her mother, and brother during her absence. This home consisted of second-floor apartments in a cheap, and to the fashionable world, utterly obscure neighbourhood; but the street in which they were situated, lying between Holborn and the New Road, bears a grand name, which, while London lasts, will have a ring of poetry in its sound, seeing that it is derived from that noble old sailor, Captain Coram, who impoverished himself by doing good; and though dying the recipient of charity himself, still lived to see his darling scheme realized, namely, the establishment of the Foundling Hospital. Millie was by no means a romantic young lady, yet somehow she was pleased with the associations connected with that double row of dull-looking houses, and liked dating a letter from "Great Coram Street." For the rest, the situation suited Charley, inasmuch as it was within an easy walk of the city; and when Charley was content, his mother was satisfied. By-and-bye we may have to look in upon the trio; meanwhile the scene lies elsewhere.

It was a cold, raw February day. The cheap incompetent governess, who just now had charge of Agnes Bendoran, found some excuses for shortening the child's lessons, and leaving her somewhat more than usual to her own devices, or it might be that she herself was called on that day to perform duties not in the bond. Certain it is that Agnes was conscious of a coming and going of people, and of an air of anxious and yet quiet bustle throughout the household. Mr. Blake had not gone to his counting-house, and though Agnes had gathered her pet books together and ensconced herself on a stool near the brightly-burning drawing-room fire, she—the sole enjoyer of it—felt restless and uneasy. Then she got out her pencils and attempted to sketch Tartar—Mr. Blake's old dog—as he lay on the hearth-rug with closed eyes, and nose nestled between his paws. But she failed to catch the fast-asleep look that he wore, so she threw her drawing into the fire, and wondered if the dog would lie still long enough for her to make a second attempt. No; he would not, for a well-known step roused him quickly, and the next moment Mr. Blake, with beaming face, entered the room.

"Well, Agnes," he exclaimed, lifting up her hands till she stood on tiptoe to kiss him, "let me tell you the news, you have a little baby brother just arrived for us all to love—are you not glad?"

"Yes, yes," and she spoke the truth; nevertheless she burst into tears. This was the event on which her childish mind had vaguely dwelt for some time past, with a strange questioning about loving and being beloved, that was in advance of her years;—and now, like many events long expected, it seemed to come upon her suddenly at last.

"Tears! Agnes," cried Mr. Blake, a little puzzled at the display of emotion, "will you not really welcome the baby?"

Agnes felt she was misunderstood, and unfortunately depth of feeling was apt to call up her infirmity; thus she stammered distressingly, and only with difficulty made Mr. Blake comprehend that she was not crying from sorrow. Perhaps he thought she was jealous of the new-comer; but if so, in this the movement of his own fresh happiness, he rather smiled at than chided the feeling.

"Now, dear Agnes," he continued, "find me

pen and ink, for I have half-a-dozen notes to write; and in my haste at being sent for yesterday, I left my keys at the office. Perhaps mamma's desk is unlocked."

But mamma's desk was not unlocked; and Agnes inquired if a certain portfolio which lay in the back drawing-room would serve for him to write on.

"The very thing," he exclaimed, hastening to find it himself. "I daresay it contains pens and paper, just as I left them when we came home."

And so it did—but as Mr. Blake carried it half-opened from one room to another, there fluttered from between the blotting leaves, and fell to the carpet, what seemed a blank sheet of paper.

"Never mind, my dear," said Mr. Blake, seeing Agnes about to pick it up and give it him, "you can keep it for some of your scribblings."

"Thank you," said Agnes, and she thought it might, perhaps, serve for a picture of waking Tartar—if he would but keep still, only she was not just now in the humour to draw him. But as she turned the paper round with artist-like examination of her material, she perceived

legible writing on one side, and could not help reading the business-like heading of a letter

"TO MISS AGNES BENDORAN,

Paris, March 29th.

Surely she was justified in proceeding a little further, so she read—

"MY DEAREST LITTLE DAUGHTER,

"Your pretty letter has given me mingled pleasure and pain. Pleasure to find you write to me so frankly, and pain that any wicked person should have distressed you by telling you an untruth. It is not true, my dear little girl, that I dislike children; on the contrary, as everyone who knows me must be aware, I am fond of children, and especially when they are good and obedient, do I dearly love them and their playful ways. Therefore, dear Agnes, never be afraid of me—but look upon me as papa, who already loves you very much, who wishes you to love him in return, and who—"

That was all, and sufficiently did it tell its own story. Her memorable letter had not offended, and the kindest of answers had been intentioned. Her first impulse was to

throw her arms round her step-father's neck, and tell him of her love and gratitude the best way she could; but that first impulse was swiftly trodden down by a stronger and bitterer thought. It was well that Mr. Blake had placed himself with his back to the ottoman on which Agnes was seated; otherwise he could not have failed to see what had happened. As it was, Agnes had time to conquer the display of her emotion unobserved, while she listened to the rapid movement of his pen, as it told to some intimate friends and relations his new dignity and happiness. When the last brief epistle was finished, he left the room hastily, so that the child was spared the temptation of breaking a resolve that was dawning in her mind.

With a real joy, a great trouble had come to her, and they lay at her heart balancing, struggling against one another. The knowledge that her childish letter had not offended, not been despised, and that her lonely little self, instead of being a trouble and a burthen, had for these long months been tenderly regarded by Mr. Blake, would yesterday have seemed to her among the greatest delights; but now it came clogged with a price so heavy

that she would willingly have foregone the possession.

She had to pay for it faith and confidence in her mother, who had told the untruth of which Mr. Blake complained; and Agnes remembered too well the message she had received from Paris, to doubt that it was her mother likewise who had prevented the completion of the letter which, in its fragmentary state, had so strangely come into her hands.

The child was very miserable; and in her misery she crept upstairs to her own little bed-room, and after locking herself in, she knelt down and prayed that God would show her what to do, and would help her, and unless to be miserable was good for her, that He would be pleased to make her less unhappy. And then out of that simple and very earnest prayer, her mind wandered into wondering how God would help her; for that He would help her she felt quite sure. Would He send one of the beautiful angels, such as she had seen in pictures, with a lily in its hand and great shining wings that reached like a garment to the ground, to instruct her how she was to keep God's commandment and honour the parent who had told her what was

not true?—or if this was too great a favour for a sorrowful little child to receive, would her own dear papa be allowed to come? He loved her so much when he was on earth, that she thought he would not mind leaving Heaven for just five minutes to do her good; or should she, like little Samuel, hear a voice speaking the message of the Unseen? In her present highly-wrought state of feeling, any such super-ordinary communication would not have overawed her. Besides, her beautiful child's faith was hitherto unsoiled by the world, untroubled by its teachings; it was still the faith that leans on love and knows not fear.

Agnes was roused from her vision of spirit messengers by a knock at her door, and the next minute she admitted her well-beloved godmother.

"At last I have found you," exclaimed Miss Hardy, on entering; "and sitting, my dear child, in the cold."

"I have not coughed or felt cold, Cousin Beta," replied Agnes, "and if you are not chilly, do please to stay with me a little while; I want to tell you something that has happened."

"Perhaps the same thing which I came to tell you—that the baby has arrived," returned Miss Hardy, smiling.

"No, it is not that, though I know it;" and as she spoke the little girl drew her visitor to a seat, and nestled herself close by Miss Hardy's side. And then, with a controlled emotion it was pathetic to witness in one so young, she told the story of her present trouble, and showed the fragment of writing which had so strangely come to hand.

"I tell you, Cousin Beta," she exclaimed, in continuation, "because you know what it was mamma said, and you sent my letter to Paris for me; but I could not tell anybody else in the world that mamma"—and in attempting to speak aloud her mother's fault she burst into tears and buried her face in Miss Hardy's lap.

"You are right, Agnes," replied Miss Hardy, deeply moved, and clasping the child fondly in her arms. "You are right; and now let me speak to you as if you were a great girl, for I know you will understand me. Let you and me hide this fault for ever, and forget it if we can. Do not presume to judge, but if you cannot wholly forget, bear this sorrow-

ful memory as a burthen you are secretly carrying for her who has borne very much for you. We cannot tell how sorry she may have been, we cannot answer for ourselves if for one moment we are deserted by the Spirit of all Truth. Never do we so much need to pray for humility as when we perceive the faults of others."

"I understand that," said Agnes; "and I see that if this letter," tearing it into atoms as she spoke, "had been sent to me I should have been asked questions, and in answering must have accused mamma—that would have been dreadful—dreadful—and oh, Cousin Beta, I feel that you were sent to me now to teach me, just as certainly as if God had sent a real angel to tell me what to do."

"I think so too," returned Miss Hardy, after a moment's pause.

"And now," continued Agnes, almost gaily, "do you think I may go and see my little brother, and give mamma a kiss?"

"My love, it was for that purpose I came to fetch you."

CHAPTER VII.

SMALL EVENTS THAT CAST BEFORE THEM GREAT SHADOWS.

"Oh you! whom vanity's light bark conveys
On fame's mad voyage by the wind of praise,
With what a shifting gale your course you fly."

POPE.

I FANCY we should obtain a considerable clarification of our ideas if we abandoned the use of certain familiar metaphors which, when put into a mental crucible for analyzation, deposit base metal instead of the pure ore of truth. For instance, people talk of time flying or creeping. It does nothing of the kind, but marches on with an even beat, a cadence which thought of aright has in it something inexpressibly grand, and even awful. Life is full of discords, because we do not keep time with that cadence, do not fill each day

with the duties it brings, and thus render the progression of a human existence as beautiful as that of a year's seasons. The inanimate creation makes no such blunders. A planet does not ask for a hundred years' leave of absence to travel a little way on the path of a comet; mountain torrents have not yet been persuaded to flow upwards; nor do figs consent to grow on thistles. Yet human beings expect results just as impossible as these things would be when they look for happiness by throwing themselves out of the orbit of duty, and mis-spending time, as hour by hour it drops from their grasp never to return; never to be filled up with the seasonable thought or word, action or suffering, which would be as seed to bring forth fruit a hundredfold; fruits even of human joy and prosperity, if we had but faith to drop the seed as conscience prompts day by day, leaving results to God—instead of our having to gather, as we so often do, the Dead Sea apples of life.

Look to it, Clara Blake—for as you have sowed and are sowing, so will you surely reap. Take account of your stock of treasure as a merchant does ere he enters on new traffic and

wide-extending schemes. Youth, health, and intellect of no mean order are yours; a good social position, and the wide influence for good or evil which that position gives; friends who were gained in the dark hour of adversity, and when the best side of your character was turned towards them, and who as yet have all that liking for you which people are apt to entertain for those they have served; a devoted husband, whose chief fault towards you is a blind worship and unreasoning indulgence of your whims and wishes; and a crowning gift is yours, the privilege of motherhood!

Are you to be an angel of light to your children, or one of darkness? It seems, however, that Agnes walks beside you, free now from the bondage of leading-strings; albeit the freedom is invisible. Corporeal power and authority over her you may and will have for long—but her soul has broken the subtle ligaments that bound it to respect and obedience. Can you weave them again—or must she learn to walk erect by other helps? How are you going to employ the rich "talents" of your privileges? What "work" in this busy world are you striving to "find" and "do?" Or are you bent on living only for the passing

indulgences of the hour, blinding your being to all true preceptions of the high and the right by an ever-rising incense of selfish enjoyment—scarcely nobler than animal satisfaction—though called by the polite world pleasure? Time, the great justifier, will show.

The baby-boy was for a few weeks an interest and amusement; especially as he was healthy and handsome, and therefore something to be admired and coveted. But even healthy children occasionally cry, and otherwise try the nerves of those who have not in their natures a deep fount of love and tenderness towards the helpless. Before the spring was far advanced Mrs. Blake discovered that Master Harry's frequent presence was too much for her; yet she found herself sufficiently strong to embark on the full stream of London gaiety.

She was presented at Court—somewhat to the amazement of her old friends, who were startled by the suddenness of her bound into fashionable life—but with the perfect approval, and to the entire satisfaction of her five hundred new acquaintances; and the height of the season was passed by her in the whirl of society. Then came the summer and autumn recrea-

tions, which braced up her nerves only to prepare her for new fatigues. And thus another year of her life rolled away, charged with its chronicle of thoughts, and acts, and intentions.

Mrs. Blake commenced her third London "season" on the old system, balls and parties, operas and fêtes, succeeding each other in quick succession; but, as weeks passed on, a discovery stole over the mind of Clara Blake. I say stole, because it did not come suddenly, and was not received with welcome; by slow degrees she felt conscious of disappointment and weariness! She was found talking, with woman's slang, of being "bored to death" at a "stupid dinner;" of crowded rooms being filled with "nobodies;" of English singers "not being worth their salt," and of the universal *ennui* which pervaded society in general. No longer was her enthusiasm kindled at pleasant introductions, as it had been on first knowing Mrs. Sutton; no longer had she that fresh enjoyment of a pleasure which to the unsatiated is tasted twice—in anticipation and in reality. The more bright her anticipations, the more dismal, generally speaking, were her realizations.

Now, instead of pausing in her career of dissipation, instead of profiting by the salutary warnings that were vouchsafed her, and retreating to healthier pursuits of mind and body, she took just the opposite course. As the opium-eater stills the gnawing and craving his diseased propensity has occasioned, by still larger doses of the deadly drug, so she sought relief from her discontent by increasing the power of her mental stimulant. Ordinary parties were flat, stale, and unprofitable —but the introduction of fancy costume, and the consequent support of imaginary characters, might give a zest to the society of common-place people. Quite in the natural sequence was it that fancy balls led to acted charades; and these, as everybody knows, usually develop their representers into actors and actresses of more or less demerit, for whom very soon the back drawing-room stage, with folding-door proscenium, becomes too narrow and insignificant an arena.

For a few weeks Mrs. Blake was interested in fancy balls and acted charades—but the progression of events was certain, and the time came when nothing but a legitimate comedy would satisfy the little band of ama-

teurs who so often and so generously had devoted themselves to the amusement of their friends—as was politely said of them on various occasions. Of course, the play selected was Sheridan's "Rivals"—because every amateur corps selects that production for a first trial of their powers; it presenting, it is said, so many characters capable of displaying talent—and we know the immense amount of talent that always exists unemployed in private life.

To carpenters and upholsterers, not to mention the servants of the house, they were weary weeks which preceded the first grand representation at the "Theatre Royal, May Fair"—to quote the heading of the bills. But when satisfactory results are expected from highly unsatisfactory means, one always knows the high pressure that must be exerted on executants; and however commodious a gentleman's house may be, it is at best but little adapted to the display of histrionic powers. Somehow or other, doors and windows are found in the wrong instead of the right places; draperies display their limited capabilities; screens have impossible duties put upon them; and the garden and grove

are tamely represented by a blooming camelia and three geraniums.

The dresses are more manageable—especially when they are got up "regardless of expense"—for great is woman's ingenuity. Mrs. Blake represented Lydia Languish, and easily adapted her presentation court dress for this theatrical occasion. She wore powder—and powder necessitates the use of rouge; and she looked very handsome, her eyes announcing themselves as decidedly as did her diamonds. Perhaps the first impression was that she looked too clever for her part—but in reality she threw all her cleverness into the delineation of exaggerated silliness which she had undertaken. Her *début* was a success, and, in point of fact, she became the star of the "company" whom she had gathered around her. To be sure, her house was the rendezvous, her husband's hospitality the *point d'appui*, for the theatrical doings which now became the rage in her set; and with a worldly section of the world, such a position as hers is a magnifying lens to merit—that is for a time, until the compensating hour of envy and detraction arrives.

And meanwhile, I hope the reader is asking

what of Agnes? The little girl had been confided to the care of a youthful, inexperienced governess, whose most important qualifications were best described by negatives. Mrs. Blake, like all undisciplined persons, sought to balance her extravagances by corresponding meannesses, and one of these took shape in the limit of twenty pounds a year which she set for the salary of her daughter's governess. Accordingly she engaged a young person, fresh from boarding-school, to whom such an engagement was decidedly a step in life; but a step which in reality she had no right to take, since she could not and ought not to hold her footing.

Miss Jones was a small tradesman's daughter, without talent, without advantages of any sort that could give her a right to break down the barriers of caste. She could read, she could write, she understood the first four rules of arithmetic, and with school-books in hand, would not be likely greatly to mislead her pupil in grammar or geography. I think she knew by heart the regular French verbs, but if you had spoken of the idioms of the language, she would not, I believe, have understood what you meant. She did not profess

to speak French, but only to teach the rudiments. Poor girl, she was much too ignorant to be at all aware how unfit she was to be an educator of the intellect; but, on the other hand, she was not dishonest, not false, not ill-tempered, and if in an evil hour her parents had not fired her with the ambition to be "a lady," in some lower and less responsible situation than she had chosen, she might have won golden opinions from her employers, and true respect from all who knew her. Her moral qualities, though not active enough to be an influence over Agnes for good, were yet decided enough to prevent the little girl from disliking her; and, indeed, it was a great boon that Miss Jones was only a little vulgar and very ignorant, for occasionally the Miss Joneses of the world, the silly commonplace girls who are too proud to be servants, are inclined to be evil as well as ignorant. But "not disliking," and "respecting," as the pupil ought to respect, the teacher, are two very different things, and Agnes could not respect Miss Jones.

The child's refinement of manner was innate; for it was the outward token of her sensitive nature and keen appreciation of the

beautiful in morals, and the beautiful in the outward world;—call the combination, if you will, truth, poetry, art,—they make a Trinity up to which you may trace all genius. If there was really any influence exercised between Miss Jones and Agnes, it was Agnes who swayed the weaker mind.

It seemed for some years of Agnes Bendoran's childhood that she was not to cling tendril-wise very closely on any human being. Perhaps she relied more entirely on her cousin Beta than on anyone else; but then, their meetings were comparatively rare. And she loved and respected her step-father more, perhaps, than she herself was aware; but a second baby had come—a little Clarissa to lisp "papa"—and Agnes reasoned with herself that she must intrude her affection less than ever.

Soon after Harry's birth, some one, with the thoughtlessness which is so often displayed towards children, had vulgarly and laughingly taunted Agnes with being jealous of the new comer, and with caressing her "papa" more joyfully than she did of old—in fact, of striving desperately to keep her place in his affections. The little girl turned red, and then very pale,

and finally burst into tears; and it was considered that she was "found out," and that she "had a temper."

She was bearing the little burthen she had, on a memorable day, consented to carry. Since reading his letter to her, she could not help loving her step-father more dearly than of old; but henceforth no one ever noticed that she was too demonstrative in the display of her affection.

But, as I have hinted, more than two years from that date had now passed away.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUTTON COURT.

"By the fireside there are youthful dreamers,
Building castles fair with stately stairways,
Asking blindly
Of the future what it cannot give them.
* * * * * * * *
Each man's chimney is his golden mile-stone,
Is the central point from which he measures
Every distance
Through the gateways of the world around him."

LONGFELLOW.

IN one of the fair central counties of England is a certain district which, for centuries past, has been famous for its loveliness and fertility. Shut out from the bleak north by a range of undulating hills, it has a milder temperature than might otherwise have belonged to its locality; and yet so gracious is the soil, and so widely open to receive the

influences of sun and air are its far-spreading lands, so freely watered are they by rapid gurgling tributaries of nobler rivers, that the district is bracing and invigorating, and has ever grown brave men and fair women, as well as produced forest-monarchs, and the ripe, early grain. There is something luscious about the land—something suggestive of wealth and hospitality, and of a grand national prosperity. In that far-back olden time which is closed from our vision, save by the rents and cracks of a few authentic records, and some vague and scarcely less precious traditions through which we look at our ancestors—in that olden time the Olden Church became the mistress of the fairest portion of the district, in this wise.

A rich layman, the wicked instrument of a bad king—a man who had harried his neighbours' territories, hanged their vassals, burnt houses over childing mothers, and otherwise broken God's laws, and not a few of those of man—discovered, late in his life's day, that "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." Stricken in the disobedience of his children, in the death of their patient mother, in the caprice of his king and the disloyalty of followers, and bowed by bodily anguish and infirmity, his miser-

able soul trembled beneath the load of guilt with which it reeked. Only on the bosom of Mother Church could he hope for peace; but although she opened her arms to receive him, it was on the condition that he walked over the burning plough-shares she placed between them. Bodily penances frightful to contemplate, and under which nineteenth-century nerves would probably succumb, he bravely endured; and he submitted to open humiliation, which, to the proud old fighter, was harder still to bear. Finally, after much telling of beads by himself, and many vicarious prayers on his behalf, the wolf-nature was subdued to that of the lamb—and the Church's stray sheep, so happily restored to the flock, bestowed his "lands and messuages," fields, meadows, and orchards, park and forest—all lying as compact and neatly joined as a lady's square of dainty silken patchwork—on the Church to found an Abbey, where prayers should be daily offered up for his sinful and not yet wholly assoiled soul.

And very fair was the Abbey which uprose on the side of a gentle hill, whose green-sward sloped towards a purling stream, the waters of which, troubled by a colony of leaping

trout, glanced silver-like in the sunshine. Tall and stout were the oaks cut down for beams and rafters, and golden was the grain that made lusty horses strain and stout waggons creak as it was borne away to be measured and bartered for building stones from a neighbouring quarry. The aged penitent was cold in his grave before the last stone was hewn and shaped; or the dark fretted roof—that mimicked nature's forest aisles—spanned the lofty walls, stooping at intervals, as if with gathering fingers, to grasp the carved and stately columns that sprang up to meet it.

And for many generations of men, the rising and setting sun streamed through purple and rosy-tinted windows; undying lamps burned, and candles shone before shrines and altars; and incense clouded the air and lulled the senses; and the *Te Deum* and *Miserere* were faithfully chanted; and the monks of the Abbey entertained princes sometimes, and daily fed beggars at their gate.

But the days came when Caxton lived and died; and the poor monks did not hear the warning bell that began to toll the hour his printing-press was set up in Westminster, and was kept swinging by every push and

pull that drew a broad sheet from its metal bed. Perhaps these monks had grown fat and drowsy; perhaps, in some obstinate effort to keep morally stationary, they had inevitably fallen back in the march of human affairs—and this might be though Ave Marias were never more musically chanted than now—and the whitening of each individual sepulchre—or of the concrete edifice—was more alabaster-like even than of old. Certain it is that in the reign of the royal wife-slayer dark stories of inward corruption anent these monks and their fine abbey lands got syllabled about, and they were among the first to be swept away by the ecclesiastical whirlwind of the age.

But if it was purposed that corruption should not have permanent hold of those pleasant lands, the prohibition extended to secular as well as clerical iniquity. A stately Elizabethan mansion rose near the site of the old abbey, but in the third generation from its first master Cromwell's Ironsides roughly intruded, and the craven "malignant" lord—who knew no wider patriotism than bigoted court sycophancy, misnamed loyalty—after hiding and skulking for weeks, escaped across the salt water, glad to purchase life by the

sacrifice of lands and house. In later and far more miserable days, his son, returning in the suite of Charles the Second, attempted to restore the fortunes of his house; and again the halls resounded to the mad sounds of untempered revelry: courtly cavaliers and bright-eyed dames sunned themselves by day on the garden terraces, in company with the peacocks, and by night threw the spotted dice, and dropped the painted cards, on which, it might be, the honour of sons, or the dowries of daughters, were staked.

Before the dull morning dawn had succeeded a certain wild midnight revel—fire, the purifier, asserted its rule—coming in the great strength which was born of a great silence; no mere smoking crackling of thorns—but a bright broad blaze that sprang out of the darkness like a huge enduring banner of sheet-lightning—and wrapped and lapped tower and turret, banquet-hall and corridors, from north to south, from east to west, in its terrible folds. Amid despairing shrieks, to save dear life was all that was attempted; fingers forgot to clutch their ill-gained gold, or even to gird themselves with their accustomed jewels. Several lives were lost—and the fear-

ful scene formed the subject of many a village tale and local ballad; and because some of the apparently least guilty perished, while "the wicked Sir Ralph" escaped, the country people long declared that an impersonation with horns and tail was visibly present, who made a bargain amid the flames for the soul belonging to the body that he saved.

This catastrophe completed the ruin of him who had sat as master within those now blackened walls. The lands passed from hand to hand for several generations, but ever appearing as if a fatality compelled them to fling off unworthy masters.

At last, about the beginning of the present century, the estate was purchased by Walter Sutton, the father of its present master; one of those men whom the world calls self-made, self-taught, but who would have called himself simply God-guided. A cottager's son, with few early recollections so strongly imprinted on his mind as were the teachings of a pious mother, whose influence rooted out of his heart all smaller fears than the fear of God. She died early—such mothers often do—and if her son had ever succeeded in showing forth to others the aspect in which

her memory rested in his heart, I believe it would have been that of a seraph sent to hold him up and guide him through the first difficult steps of his pilgrimage. Bible history he knew so early, that every development of his mind, after ten years old, extracted some new strength from his knowledge, to be a coat of mail in the battle of life. This was the orphan boy who came to London with—the old story—five shillings in his pocket, and rose to be a senator and a millionnaire. In the wilderness of busy traffic he was guided by a pillar of fire—and it led him unscathed even to worldly honour and prosperity.

I think he purchased the estate of Mowbray Court partly on account of its clinging traditions. He liked to indulge the fancy that Nature herself thus owned and asserted her fealty to the God alike of morals and of physical life; and he despised no subtle link, however slender, that might help to lift his children spiritually, in thought or aspiration, towards the unseen.

How the lands flourished, how schools were built, and how a church arose on the site of the old abbey, need only be hinted at here; but it was curious to observe how pertina-

ciously the country-people insisted on changing the name of the place. On parchment, in guide-books, and at post-office, you might call it Mowbray Court if you would—but the village gossip, and the lisping child, the smart post-boy, and the busy parish beadle knew better. The pretty romantic name was meaningless—or suggestive at best of a closed house with weed-grown gardens;—of high rents and a sharp bailiff—of a squalid village and a gorged workhouse;—but the other word! why, it made the yeoman toss up his hat—thought and deed flashing together—it made young eyes brighten with hope, and old ones dim with gratitude;—it made the reapers reap by starry moonlight "with a will"—it made the scapegrace poacher turn aside and cry "not there"—it made election time a really sacred ovation—in short, the county would have it for their watch-word and their rallying point—and Mowbray must be wiped clean away; so at last, even in legal documents, it came to stand "Mowbray, commonly called Sutton."

For nearly thirty years the first Walter Sutton was the wise and beloved master of this lovely district. A long term of human

life this, when it is filled out by warm emotions and energetic actions; but the old man's warm emotions were ever more or less disciplined, and his actions, being guided by a calm, wise will, moved on with a certain grand quietness. In truth, he was every way too large and strong ever to be, or to seem, in a bustle or hurry; so that workers of the impulsive "by fits and starts" genus, who, not having learnt the grammar of method and order, fail to understand their language when they see it written—as well as small people not qualified for the measuring of giants—had every now and then to be startled and surprised by changes that had grown up under their eyes without being recognised till they were complete.

The dust that returned to dust, the poor remains of this great-natured man, rest in a modest mausoleum in the twice-consecrated ground of the village church. But his influence! ah! that was not to be limited to time or place,—for the influence of a great good man, in the impulse he gives to the thought-wavelets around him, is as far-stretching as the ether that wraps our globe, and as beacon-like as the stars of heaven.

Contrary to the prevailing idea and the story-teller's sometimes convenient plan, this "founder of a family" did not leave worthless children behind him. Very far otherwise. The second Walter Sutton, to whose home and household I must shortly introduce the reader, resembled his father in the leading point of his character, and allowing fairly for the different circumstances of each in his early life, might be considered almost a reproduction of the original type. He also had been taught "the beginning of Wisdom" at a mother's knee, but it was not beneath a cottage roof, and "the lines" that "had fallen in pleasant places," had softened and rounded what might have been defensive angles of character in one who had to make a way wedge-like in the world. But in heart and principle, in clear seeing and persistent doing, and, more than all, in a certain self-discipline which tamed down the invisible rebels of temper, and pride, and selfishness, and laid them prostrate beneath the nobler faculties of the mind, father and son were of kin as close as that of their human relationship.

Margaret, his wife, was a help-meet for such a man. Chosen in the spring-time of his life,

she had justified the prevision of youth and faith in a true love. Only in the same sense that her husband was well born did she consider herself ennobled. Nay, even from a deeper obscurity than rested on the ancestry of Walter Sutton had her father emerged. All he ever mentioned of his boyhood was that he was early orphaned, and ran away from the harsh usage of a stepmother at fourteen years old; that in the tender years of youth he worked with his hands till they were hard and horny, yet never begged nor borrowed; that in early manhood the hands had won their rest, and once again grew soft and fair—as they do when the head takes all the share of labour. Godfrey Johnstone and Walter Sutton had been fast friends for a quarter of a century before their children wedded, and for once, first love and the parents' dearest wish were satisfied and fulfilled.

Godfrey Johnstone, the hale old man, the white-haired "grandfather," was a frequent guest at Sutton Court—nay, the family-picture would not have been complete without that venerable figure. For he was a picturesque personage, with the beauty of old age upon him, which, like the beauty of a winter land-

scape, has not had half justice done to it by poets and painters. True, there were many who did not pen or paint or prate their inspirations, who instinctively felt the presence of this old man as a gracious boon, though they did not define the why or wherefore of the pleasure it gave. Slender of figure, and a little above the middle height, the old man stooped slightly, and never walked abroad without the support of a stout oaken stick. Was his somewhat tremulous gait to be deprecated? Far otherwise; it harmonised with colourless cheeks, and hair white as the drifted snow. Even the eyebrows were partially blanched, but from beneath them gleamed a pair of dark eyes, at times so piercing, and always so lustrous, that it was very evident the threescore and ten of years already passed had not bowed or dimmed the mind, however, by time's inevitable law, they might have preyed upon the body.

It is late in August when summer and autumn stretch forth their meeting hands, that together they may crown the land with beauty. Who is there so dull of fancy as not to be able in thought to sketch an English landscape at such a season?—when the sharper

outlines of spring-time and early summer have moulded into traceries of ineffable grace, and when the richest and brightest hues of nature are in like manner softened and mellowed to every lustrous and graduated tint.

Near the open window of a cheerful morning room sat Mrs. Sutton, engaged in letter-writing. Swiftly moved her pen on the large sheet of thin paper, whose texture proclaimed its commission was for foreign service. But other letters, written and received, strewed her writing table, and there was something in the aspect of the room which proclaimed its occupant a busy, if not a business person. It was not a gentleman's library, and far less was it a lady's boudoir. It was Mrs. Sutton's own room, with library shelves, on which rested a few of her favourite books, and a great number of works of reference. On the walls were miniature portraits of her husband and children, and the two grandfathers of the latter some ruled maps, mounting one of the corners; and there on four slips of leaves and dates, not fully comprehensible to anyone but herself. It was unfortunately but too frequently furnished for mourning costume, and the tokens of the retirement are under

in a "work-room," luxury and show would there be out of place: besides, this apartment was often in request as an audience chamber, even sometimes as a kind of forum where judgment was pronounced—and Mrs. Sutton objected to dazzling her homely friends with a display of magnificence. The refinement which pervaded the spot was of a sort that lowly visitors could steadily appreciate without awe or astonishment.

And yet, Margaret Sutton, you must plead guilty to one excess of luxury—indeed you must—there is no escape for it! This room, that opens into a balcony, from whence a flight of steps descends to the pleasure-grounds, the steps being bordered by flowering plants that arch and meet overhead—this room of yours —which you laughingly call den, cave, forbidden blue-chamber, or by any term that can warn idlers from its threshold—commands a prospect that is not to be outmatched in the county. An English prospect, made up of hill and valley, corn-fields and meadow-lands, glittering orchards, and crystal water-courses, and a noble wood whose sylvan loveliness is after all but suggested by this enticing distant view; for forest scenery, like some human natures,

requires us to come quite close, nay, to enter the very heart of it before we can recognise its wealth of strength and varied beauty.

Of course that wide-spreading scene had its mysterious influence on the place, for nature never wearies of teaching us if we will but look and listen. I cannot tell how other minds were affected by the lovely environments of Sutton Court, but its mistress has admitted that more than once some Gordian knot of difficulty and indecision has untwisted while she gazed—for rest—from the window of her sanctum. Perhaps even now some question of "Shall I?" or "Shall I not?" arises in the midst of her letter-writing, for she lays down her pen for a while, and leans back in her chair to think. Then she rises and steps out through the French window on to her flower-scented balcony. She gathers a jasmine spray—I think mechanically—and as she gazes thoughtfully on the scene whose every line she knows by heart, the grey finger-like spire of the church becomes somehow associated with her meditations. Well, she has decided, but I wish, before she returns to finish her letter, her portrait could be taken. There is a sort of harmony between herself and the season.

She has passed her fortieth year, and thus touched upon the autumn of life; and yet with the graces of its summer still clinging about her. You can see by all the tokens of dress and manner that she does not shrink from Time's outstretched hand, and thus it touches her lovingly; delving and blanching of course, but so gently that the new lines are in reality lines of a new beauty. Neither blonde nor brunette, with features far from regular, and whose charm was entirely in the expression of which they were susceptible, her face had perplexed every artist who had essayed to paint it: as for the daguerreotypes and photographs of coming years, they, in due time, have been attempted, but invariably condemned to the flames as the most atrocious and libellous of all her portraits.

Mrs. Sutton was turning from the balcony when her step was arrested by a sound which she loved well—the voices of her children. "Mamma, mamma dear, pray stop a minute, I want to speak to you very much," exclaimed the clear ringing voice of Philippa Sutton; "if you are not busy, may I come up, and Godfrey also?"

And scarcely waiting for permission, Philippa

tripped up the steps with wonderful agility, considering that she had just returned from riding, and still wore her habit. But it has to be confessed that the *mignonne* Philippa, not yet twelve years old, was already a little amazon, to whom the amazonian gear was an almost daily attire, which she managed with a skill and grace peculiar to her little self, whether mounted on her favourite "Rascal," or stepping on *terra firma*. Godfrey, a handsome lad of fifteen, came up more leisurely.

"We have had an accident," exclaimed Philippa; "Agnes has been thrown, but, indeed, she is not much hurt; see, she is walking across the lawn with Edgar—only I wished to come and tell you about it myself."

"Thrown from the pony!" reiterated Mrs. Sutton, in real distress, and hurrying forward to meet her little guest, who was visible in the distance, walking somewhat lame, but tenderly supported by Edgar Sutton, a boy of thirteen—"Thrown from her pony! tell me how did it happen—I desired she might have Edgar's Lily, the quietest creature in the stable."

"Yes, mamma, she rode Lily," returned Philippa.

"And Lily threw her! Tell me—tell

me how it happened?" asked the mother, eagerly.

To this question there was no prompt reply; but, after a few moments, Philippa exclaimed, "Godfrey," looking at her brother as she spoke, and accentuating the word so that it sounded almost like a petulant stamp of the foot.

But now they had met the little sufferer, and Godfrey had missed his brief opportunity of acknowledging with a good grace the share he had had in the disaster.

Agnes Bendoran's foot was bruised and grazed, and her habit and hat were considerably damaged by the heap of mud into which she had fortunately fallen, but nothing worse had happened; and when Mrs. Sutton's first anxiety was relieved, she turned once more to demand an explanation of the accident.

"Phil can tell you if she likes," replied Godfrey, somewhat sulkily; "she knows as much about it as I do."

"Very well," replied Philippa, gravely, "only I thought you would wish yourself to tell mamma that you gave Lily a sudden cut, and sent her off at a gallop without dear Aggy knowing what you were about. Edgar is used

to your foolish tricks, and always on his guard, and I take great blame to myself for suffering Rascal to keep in the front, instead of my watching what you were about. Yet, certainly, I supposed you wished to be thought a gentleman, and that you would behave with kindness and consideration to your sister's guest."

"Oh, you need not put on your grand duchess airs," returned Godfrey, with a sneer; "you don't suppose I expected Miss Bendoran to be thrown, do you? I thought she was accustomed to riding."

"So she is."

"Twelve lessons in a riding-schòol, I find."

"You rude boy!" whispered Edgar.

"Silence, children!" exclaimed Mrs. Sutton; "do not add to your faults, whatever they may be, by quarrelling now. I hope Godfrey will profit by the lesson thrust on him; and, meanwhile, I recommend him to make a humble apology to our dear young friend for the pain and fright he has occasioned her."

"Oh, Mrs. Sutton," interrupted Agnes, who by this time was seated on a garden-chair, with Philippa's arm passed fondly round her waist—"indeed, Mrs. Sutton, he has

apologised, and the pain was very little, and it happened so suddenly that I had not time to be frightened; if you please, do not be angry with him. I think the accident was greatly my fault, for I was looking at Philippa, and wondering if I should ever ride as well as she does, instead of thinking how best to manage Lily."

"You acquit Lily, don't you?" said Edgar, putting in a word for his pony.

"Quite—quite. Lily stopped short in a moment when I fell, and almost told me how sorry she was; oh, don't blame Lily. Indeed, there is nothing in the accident I in the least care about, except making other people so sorry."

"Where was the groom all the time?" asked Mrs. Sutton, addressing Philippa.

"Looking after me, mamma, dear—he never thinks harm can come to anybody else—so he keeps close at my heels. He had passed by the others to be near me; I believe I *was* showing off Rascal, and making him pretend tantrums when the accident happened—and perhaps, after all, it is I that ought to beg Agnes's pardon;" and as a method of begging pardon, she began to kiss and hug her little friend.

Very curious was the childish friendship which existed between these two little maidens! Very sacred was it in the eyes of thoughtful people! Equally earnest, and truthful, and truth-loving; equally reverential in their hearts towards everything on earth—and above it—most worthy of reverence, many fine fibres of their nature seemed closely entwined; and out of these undying roots grew up their love and faith in each other. But, mentally, intellectually, they were not less different than were their physical frames. Agnes was fair, and promised to be tall and slender, of delicate health and meditative temperament, excessively sensitive, but little disposed to display her emotions.

Philippa Sutton was, on the contrary, a sparkling brunette, with every indication that she would remain a *petite* though graceful personage. Not less sensitive than her friend, she was much more demonstrative—probably because no early trials had "broken her spirit" or checked the display of her enthusiasm. There was a certain swiftness in all her capacities. She generally recognised truth at a glance; and instead of pausing to parley with it, and admire it, she promptly acted upon her

knowledge, and spoke out her loves and hates with a quick sincerity which sometimes ruffled the proprieties of conventionalism. Active almost to a degree of restlessness, her body certainly participated in the energy of her mind—and so, perhaps, maintained the balance of mental and bodily health. It is not so, however, with all quick-witted people, young or old. There are multitudes of persons endowed with fine and subtle, and to the world most precious talents, who cannot work both limbs and brain, and who draw their best strength from retirement and composure; but Philippa Sutton was endowed with what people call the sanguine temperament—anything like bodily confinement was absolute torture to her, and she needed the exhilaration of air, exercise, and rapid motion to set her mental powers in working order.

The Suttons were accused of spoiling their children—a phrase often used very senselessly. I do not believe great love or extreme indulgence —provided it is not of the capricious kind—ever "spoilt" a child—but I am not arguing that question here. What has to be observed is this. The family had been thinned by two early deaths, and, with or without reason,

doctors hinted that the departed little ones had over-studied, and that their bodily frames had not been sufficiently inured by out-of-door exercise to the changes of our changeful climate; and so no error on the same side ever occurred again. The boys rode, walked, boated, and played cricket even to the hearts' content of themselves; and the sisterless sister all along joined in their amusements in a manner which she considered highly delightful. It is simply impossible to say what she had gained or what she had lost by her somewhat unique mode of education—but one thing may be admitted, that the three children presented instances of more distinct development of individual character than is usually apparent at their ages.

Godfrey, the Rugby scholar—now home for vacation—was a thorough boy; which I take to mean that he was on the high road to becoming a mannish man—mannish being a different sort of adjective from manly.

Edgar, the younger brother, was also a Rugby boy; and in classical attainments already trod nearly on the heels of the elder. Nevertheless Godfrey's two or three years of seniority, added to what he called "knowledge

of life," enabled him to "lord it" over his brother in rather a tyrannical fashion; more especially as Philippa, though "only a girl," positively refused all manner of allegiance to the young despot. Indeed, she was not without a sort of influence over both her brothers; keeping the strong will of the one at bay by her own force of character; and by her deep love and keen sympathy, and quick appreciation of his noble gifts, aiding the nature of the other to expand, just as warmth and light bid delicate blossoms to open.

But this is a long digression, consequent on Agnes Bendoran's accident; and Mrs. Sutton must hasten to complete her letters by post-time. After recommending the little girls to change their dress, she exclaimed:—

"I am writing to Lady Isabella—have you young folks any messages?"

"My best love," said Philippa eagerly, "and thank her for sending me her new book —I am quite proud of having a book with my name in it, 'from the author,' and tell her I should have finished it quite by this time, only Edgar would read it first—you know, mamma, it is his way to seize upon every book he sees I like."

"Dear Phil," remonstrated Edgar, "you said I might read it first."

"I know I did, because you read so fast, there is no great hardship in waiting to come after you. Still, truth is truth, and you always do take up the books I am reading, you very good-for-nothing darling. However, books are only books—I don't care so much about them; but just now please to give me up my friend whom you are whispering to—"

"Only about Lily."

"Never mind what about—come along, Agnes."

"Mamma, mamma," said Edgar, following his mother, "tell godmamma that I like her new book—oh! so much, and quite understand it, and that if she won't come back to England, I must go some day to Florence to see her—"

"I dare say!"

"Why not?"

"And have you no message, Godfrey?"

"Oh! of course, my kind regards," answered the elder boy.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. BLAKE AND THE LADY IN ITALY.

"I tormented your youth, I have darkened your fate."
OWEN MEREDITH.

FRAGMENTS FROM MRS. SUTTON'S LETTER TO LADY ISABELLA CLINTON.

184—.

* * * * "*Coraggio!* my dear friend. You see I give you back your own watchword, and fancy that I hear the dear voice whose tones of sympathy often in the old days infused courage into my own fainting heart. Depend upon it you *are* doing, and have done 'something' for the people whom you love so well, and whose wrongs you so warmly desire to see redressed. But don't be like a child, who, having planted his little garden plot with mignonette, digs it up the next week to see if the tiny seeds are shooting forth, and

has not patience to wait for the natural growth —rather a slow one—of the fragrant little flower. Is it 'nothing,' my dearest Bella, that when your humble servant hears absurd nonsense talked by people who should know better, seeing that they are personages in a position to lead, by their opinions, the opinions of many others—is it nothing, I say, that I am able, through the knowledge I gather from your very precious letters, to set these foolish babblers right on many a matter of fact—and often, by the use of your own suggestive arguments and terse expressions, to set their minds on the right track of thinking? Is it nothing that your 'Songs beside the Arno' are echoed beneath our colder skies—not with a sudden noisy popularity, but with what, to my mind, is a far sweeter and more abiding music. Your verses fall melodiously on the ears and hearts of the young, and on those of maturer years who have contrived to keep their natures fresh and youthful. Be satisfied; and heed not the sneers of those critics who complain of your language, because they cannot apprehend your ideas. If all your pages were garnished with explanatory notes, such minds would miscomprehend just as they do at present.

"You are wrong in fancying that the English public do not care for Italian subjects or Italian affairs. These things have a deep interest—when attention is directed to them—to all generous and right-minded people; and though this class may seem small, remember it is a grand fructifying minority of the kind that always in the long run wins—not the rotten minority believing in a worn-out fallacy that has nothing left for it but to dwindle and die. When folks talk of a minority, it would be well for them to be quite sure which sort of minority they are lamenting or rejoicing over.

"I wonder if each generation has always felt its own vast importance in the world's history? or if we are right in believing this a special and wonderous transition period, in which the battle of Christ and Antichrist is being fiercely fought in a thousand unsuspected places? The fumes of the battle, as you say, seem to rise in our nostrils, making the weak drowsy, but rousing the strong like a stimulant. The work my husband gets through is really astonishing; what with Corn Law Repeal and the working of Mechanics' Institutions, and his crotchet about keeping the army and navy efficient, not to mention a little gentle

meddling with the poor dress-makers' distresses, and the overtasked shopmen's late-hour system. Belonging to no party, the House and the Press call him a bundle of contradictions; but what does that matter? His hands are not tied up with redtape, and so are able to be ceaselessly active—and for good, I hope and believe. A few friends understand the spring which governs his actions, and makes them in the best, not the worst sense, 'consistent.'

* * * * * *

"And now, my dear Isabella, about our little friend Agnes Bendoran, who is spending this holiday-time with my children. I do not deny that I made the acquaintance of her worldly-minded mother entirely at your request, and for the purpose of keeping watch, if possible, over the unseen object of your regard; but that is now a story of long ago, and besides, a certain grade of London society is so diffusive that I think, under any circumstances, I must have come to know the lady, and probably to be on visiting terms with her, especially as Walter has been acquainted with Mr. Blake for many, many years. So do not, my dear friend, consider yourself under so

huge an obligation to me; you will not do so, I hope, when I tell you that now I have a sincere affection for this little girl, and that I thank you for having had any part in giving Philippa such a companion. You know how fastidious I am about the associations my children may form, knowing that early in life the unprofessed instructions are the most important of all. I can see by many signs how good an influence she has over Philippa, making her out of pure sympathy pause to think with Agnes, and thus to see the deeper into many things—though I hepe the good influence is mutual, for my Philippa's high spirits are infectious, and the quiet, wise little Agnes is apt to be a shade too grave for her years. For the rest, their friendship has already something womanish in it—and I rejoice at this, for I have long been of opinion that a true unselfish bond of affection between women is often only second to their love and fear of God, in its power of shielding their hearts from harm. It is so good for girls to be used to a deep affection! the unloved and unloving heart being the one most likely to be taken by storm. Parents cannot be all in all—it never was intended they should be; and

usually, when they seek to be this all, they end in finding their influence worse than nothing. I recognised and tasted this unpalatable truth some time ago, and have felt the better for it ever since.

"So you see, dear Bella, I look upon the acquaintance of Agnes as a great boon, and mean to cherish it for her own sake, and for the sake of my sisterless daughter. But to satisfy you with a promise, I hereby assure you that, for your sake, I will keep watch over this child systematically and continuously, as far as circumstances may permit, and will help her with love, and sympathy, and advice as if she were indeed your own daughter. Nor are the circumstances so opposing as they might be. Why, Mrs. Blake looks up to me with respect I do not quite make out—seeing that our ways of life are in most respects very different—but that she does so regard me I cannot be insensible. Consequently my invitations are never refused, and, as you know, the little girl is frequently our guest.

"It is quite holiday-time just now; the boys are at home from Rugby—and my prime minister, Mrs. Chester, is visiting her relations —dear soul, I am sure, like all governesses,

she wanted recreation, though she writes me word she is ready to come 'home.' Edgar is as great a devourer of books as ever. He got hold the other day of the '—— Review,' and was more irate on the subject than I dare-say you yourself have been. I am to tell you that *he* 'quite understands your new book, and likes it very much.' Think of the urchin's critical impudence! But I believe what he says is true, for I know that at least he has learnt your spirited ballad, 'Pietro Capponi,' by heart—I hear him quoting it so frequently; and you have inoculated him with an interest in Florentine history. Moreover, he says, if you will not come to England, he must some day go to Italy to see you. Fortunately the 'some day' qualifies the promise, but in truth your 'own boy' loves you as dearly as when he used to cling about your neck and could only lisp your name.

"All my darlings are in health—a great blessing—for you know how past trials have made me tremble on that score. * * * * As to what my children promise to be—that is in Other Hands than mine. I am not sure whether Godfrey has improved or not under the discipline of a public school. Yet I

think, for the generality of boys, public schools are admirable; in those miniature worlds they make mistakes and gain experience at less cost than they do in life's real arena. Only is it not a want in these establishments—just as it is in the Man's larger world—that the softening, purifying, Christianising woman's element is nearly or wholly absent? And some boys stand much more in need of this corrective element than others. Why is it the world dares not take the hint afforded by nature's own family arrangements, and educate boys and girls together? But, oh, this education question! My brain tangles whenever I think of it, for I always see the difficulties, and seldom their true solution."

If Agnes Bendoran had been permitted to read the lengthy and confidential epistle from which the foregoing passages are extracted, perhaps she would have discovered an answer to some of the riddles in her little life; and especially a reply to a certain question which she had put to her cousin Beta one memorable summer afternoon, long ago. Yet, perhaps not, for Agnes was no egotist, and therefore was always slow to think herself of importance to anyone.

The name of Lady Isabella Clinton was so completely a household word at Sutton Court, that it was impossible a frequent guest, such as Agnes had become, could do other than form for herself an ideal of the personage who was so often a subject of conversation. Certainly, the materials out of which she had to build up this image were, to a child's mind, a little incongruous. More than once she had heard Mr. Sutton say "Lady Isabella has a head on her shoulders," and at first it was rather a puzzle to Agnes to follow out, what his manner seemed to imply, that a great number of people walked about the world without that necessary appendage—or with sham ones instead of real. Then Mrs. Sutton one day, speaking of her friend, declared that she had the largest heart of any woman she ever knew, and that out of her heart she wrote books. Whereupon Agnes—mistaking the "ought to be" for the "is"—made a mental memorandum that it was necessary for an author to have a real genuine head, and a very large heart. Once Agnes timidly inquired if Lady Isabella was tall or short, or like anybody she knew.

"Nearly mamma's height—neither tall nor

short," answered Philippa, "but not like her otherwise."

"Not like anybody!" exclaimed Edgar, "you never saw such beautiful eyes, and such hair —I can show you one of her curls; she had so many that I cut one off without her knowing it till hours afterwards."

"She is a great deal too blue for my taste," said Godfrey, with a due degree of mannish-boy contempt; "I don't admire blue-stockings. Lady Isabella is all very well for an old maid, if she would leave off talking and writing of things above her comprehension—

"'Tis a pity when charming women
Talk of things which they don't understand—"

You know the song."

"Above her comprehension," replied Philippa indignantly; "why, when papa quoted one of her letters in the House of Commons, the passage was cheered, and thought particularly sensible."

"Oh, it went down," returned Godfrey, "because he quoted it, and he took care not to say it was written by a woman."

"He took care not to drag Lady Isabella's name before the public," retorted Philippa.

"At Rugby," pursued Godfrey, "one hears both sides of a question; you don't suppose I am bound to inherit my father's politics, as if they were heirlooms never to be changed away?"

"Heirlooms! how absurd for us to talk of such things!" exclaimed his sister.

"Philippa," returned Godfrey, "I wish you would refrain from disagreeable reminders; you have no pride, I think."

"Pride!" said the little girl, "I have more pride than you, only it is of a different sort."

But just then the venerable grandfather passed within earshot, and interrupted the young disputants by chiding both—"Pride! pride!" he exclaimed "who is boasting of pride as if it were a virtue?"

"I," said Philippa gaily, and holding up her face for a kiss. "I, grandpapa, for I am very proud of you."

"Not proud, child, I will not have the word used. There is not a sin that cannot be traced to some sort of pride; nor a sorrow that cannot be traced to somebody's sin. Remember what I say when you boast of being proud."

It will be perceived that the Sutton children,

with their marked differences of character, made a social atmosphere for Agnes Bendoran, that had in it something fresh and breezy; and formed a contrast to her customary home life, not less striking than did the pure air and enchanting scenery round Sutton Court contrast with the heavy atmosphere and multitudinous bricks and mortar of London. And as time passed by, she grew to consider the occasions of her gradually extended visits to Sutton Court as the bright periods of the year. The most solid parts of her education she, in reality, owed to Philippa's kind governess, who accepted this extra and occasional pupil without demur.

Mrs. Blake called herself unfortunate in her governesses, and frequently changed them. In the later days to which we are now approaching, the little Blakes were the main consideration; and one can hardly imagine how desultory and unsatisfactory the training of poor Agnes might have been, but for the wise and kind friends with whom so much of her time was spent.

Truth to tell, as years passed on, Mrs. Blake systematically ignored the fact that her daughter was no longer a little child. I suppose

when persons are occupied with the fatiguing process of throwing dust into other people's eyes, some of it flies into their own; so that at last they themselves cease to see objectionable things quite clearly. Like all women who live entirely in and for the world, she clung to the skirts of her receding youth, and disliked her years to be proclaimed by the presence of her tall daughter; consequently she was pleased at the girlish friendship which took Agnes so often from home. George Sand says somewhere that it is an evil sign of character when human nature in appearance belies the burthen of its years. In the one extreme the passions must have unduly fretted the frame—in the other a cold heartlessness has kept the countenance still, and suffered the mask of youth to set. I recast the meaning of the

"Large-brained woman and large-hearted man,"

to the best of my recollection, for the comfort of those readers who, advancing onward in the "thirties," look their age.

Certainly Mrs. Blake preserved for many years the full bloom of her *seconde jeunesse*; and when sometimes lady acquaintances with

terrible memories asserted how old she must be, gentlemen refused to believe, and set down the true report to the account of envy. Very curious is it what subterfuges are resorted to, what careful habits of keeping chronology consistent are engendered for the sake of appearing young a few years longer. A few years! till some day the balance is turned, and we begin to be proud of growing old—and now the interesting recollections of our fifth year are disentombed—resuscitated after silence for a generation—and we are vain of being able to pronounce on the best likeness of that great man who died when we were shedding our first teeth. People smile—they have been less deceived than we fancied.

There was a spiteful discharged servant who, in the days of her fast friendship with a cousin's old housekeeper, heard all the particulars about a certain coming of age, and had sufficient arithmetic to count on by the tens; and there was a schoolfellow who used to be years our junior! People will talk—more or less—about such trifles.

I wonder it does not strike a certain order of persons that it is just a little snobbish to be false about the matter of age! Royalty can-

not so offend; *vide* authorised registers, and gilt-edged ladies' pocket-books. And I look upon it as a right royal piece of their fortunes —to be weighed against many court enthralments—that princesses are saved at least from this one mean sort of temptation. Ladies of high degree cannot so offend—easily. *Vide* the Peerage, which, with all its errors and veilings, has approximations apparent enough to the diligent searcher.

But, however blooming Mrs. Blake remained, her husband, as years passed by, showed the dents of time. And, moreover, he acquired an anxious and worn expression of countenance, quite irrespective of his age—a look as if he were for ever keeping some invisible object at bay. No wonder—for the rôle of man-of-business, combined with that of man of society, though often played for a few years with apparent impunity —generally breaks down the hardiest constitution at last. If it be objected that men who lead this sort of life do not, in reality, work harder, or exist with less repose than do certain eminent men in a higher grade of life, who are hale and active to extreme old age,—it might be answered that such persons have rarely, if ever, experienced that peculiar nervous strain

which is always associated with working for fortune or income, no matter on how extended a scale. With the peer or commoner of secure private means the "worst" never presents a very gloomy aspect. If health fails, or parties change places, he can retire from the scene and employ the grand gift—the awful talent—Leisure—just as he wills. In point of fact he cannot fully and fairly comprehend the primal curse on Adam, for he is exempted from its literal fulfilment—taking instead a burthen of responsibilities which he possibly learns to regard as shadows.

But with the man of business, conscious of the ramifications of his dependencies, the case is different. Honour, fame, means of existence, all hang together:

> "You take my house, when you do take the prop
> That doth sustain my house; you take my life
> When you do take the means whereby I live."

And if the man of business is sometimes accused of being a Mammon worshipper, let us take heed what we ourselves are who throw at him the stones of censure. If he is a successful man of business—and no others excite envy—we may be quite sure he is not a fool,

and that therefore he knows, quite as well as we do, that there are human sorrows incomparably more poignant than poverty *per se*—but he has probably seen enough of life to know also that there is not a human sorrow, however deep and sacred, which want of money does not make more subtly agonizing; like the tightening of the last screw to the wretched victim tortured on the rack. It is because he is far-seeing; that his anxieties are so great; and unless he can look still farther—can see where, beyond the ocean of human events, the Rock rises, and can plant the spiritual foot of faith thereon, heeding not the soughing of the threatening winds that blow from every quarter —unless he is really a Christian man and can do this—the busy man of business is of all others the one most likely to be fretted by anxiety and made prematurely old. It is only a devotional persistence in regarding money ever as a means of doing his little parcel of God's appointed work on earth—never as a selfish end for personal enjoyments—that can keep his spirit fresh and the pulses of his heart calmly beating.

Early in life Compton Blake had had his aspirations and his yearnings after something

like an ideal life. But gradually the world and its influences became strong with him. Nevertheless his love of truth, his innate sense of honour, his natural benevolence of heart, moulded him to a character which soon gained much liking and respect from a large mass of his fellow-men; he was active—continually more and more active—in his mercantile pursuits—the helper many ways of many men—not knowingly the oppressor of any—exemplary, so people said, in his domestic relations; and yet, with all this, he had suffered a web of sophistries to be woven around him—a web once so slight that his breath might have broken it, but now so knotted by accumulating circumstances that he knew not how to be released from his bondage. He sighed for repose—he wearied of the vortex of society into which he had been drawn; but how could he be so selfish as to condemn his brilliant wife to privacy and seclusion,—how be so cruel to his children as to deprive them of all the advantages of "good connections?"

CHAPTER X.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

"The fineness of which metal is not found
In fortune's love; for then the bold and coward,
The wise and fool, the artist and unread,
The hard and soft, seem all affin'd and kin:
But in the wind and tempest of her frown,
Distinction, with a broad and powerful fan,
Puffing at all, winnows the light away,
And what hath mass or matter by itself
Lies rich in virtue and unmingled."

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

HAVE my readers forgotten Millie Farrell? I must for a while go backwards in this history, or she will be as little remembered by them as she was—I am obliged to own—by the small world of Mrs. Blake's visiting acquaintances; a small world that just knew her through its eye-glass, from having seen her sometimes

sitting silent in a corner at large parties, or at chance morning visits—when the illness of children, or some other domestic *bouleversement* rendered the presence of the "useful" niece desirable.

The Farrells had been for four or five years established in Great Coram Street, and though the lodging-house furniture was visibly more shabby, the place had a thoroughly home-look about it, and a positive air of comfort. Millie had long since installed herself manager and housekeeper, for it was in Mrs. Farrell's nature to shrink from trouble and responsibility, and whenever it was possible to follow the leading of some stronger will than her own. Consequently Millie was the real mistress of the little *menage*, though mistress with a divided rule, since her brother took care to assert himself the master. But during the last four years Millie had unlearned almost as much as she had learned, and one of her unlearnings had resulted in her ceasing to regard Mr. Charles Augustus as a paragon of intellect, and a model of moral perfection.

She had also grown daring; when subjects of conversation arose on which she differed from him in opinion—and this was very often

—she told him so plainly, and argued with him to the very best of her ability; and, moreover, when apparently beaten by the plausible verbiage, by the use of which in argument men so often seem to conquer, she usually remained unconvinced, and did not even pretend to yield. An unpardonable fault, which commonly brought down a hail-storm of hard words, of which "dogged," "prejudiced," "ignorant chit" were about the mildest. Indeed, in plain language, the brother and sister very often squabbled.

Another thing concerning Millie Farrell may be noted here. She had fallen into a strange way of life, by which, in these latter years, her mind had developed more than her affections; and unless something happens to restore the balance, the chances just now are very great that she will grow into what is called, but not what is, "a strong-minded woman."

If some child could be thrust upon her for guidance; or some oppressed fellow-creature claim her help or counsel, and insist on clinging to her for it; or if her mother were stricken by illness and made dependent on her care, the hard rind that is growing up

about her really tender heart would soon be split away. Of course falling heartily in love would save her at once; but there seems no chance of such a thing—indeed, her obduracy in these matters is included in the summing up of her "strong-mindedness." To be sure Millie's experience of man-kind, as presented to her in certain near relations, has not been flattering to the sterner sex; and her rather extreme opinions on some subjects have grown out of her best points of character, not her worst. I do not mean to say that she was already a man-hater; but certainly she had found herself despising several men with a depth of scorn that she had never felt kindled towards any woman.

It was the dusk of a November evening, and Mrs. Farrell had laid down her work, and sat at the window watching the lamp-lighter as one after another the jets of flame sprung forth at the touch of his wand. Millie had been absent for some hours; but the reading-room of the British Museum closed about this time, and her mother knew that she would be home immediately. In fact, just as Mrs. Farrell was flattening her nose against the cold window-pane, in her endeavour to command the fullest

view of the street, Millie, with a brisk step, entered the room.

"Oh! my dear, you quite startled me," said Mrs. Farrell; "I never heard you knock."

"No, mother" (she had left off saying mamma), "I have got a latch key at last—I wonder I never thought of it before."

"My dear Millie, what an odd thing for a young lady to have!"

"Never mind that," replied Millie; "odd things are sometimes right things; and as Charley has a latch-key for his own convenience, I have one now for mine, that is that I may save poor Nancy a run up the steep kitchen stairs every time I come home." As she spoke she looked admiringly for a moment at her new possession, and then dropped it into her pocket as a matter of course.

"Oh! she'll be glad, no doubt; but still, my dear, I don't think it is quite proper—I don't think it looks well—I really should not like people to know—"

"My dear mother," interrupted the daughter, "I do nothing of which I am ashamed. People are welcome to know everything,—that is," and for a wonder Millie grew a little

confused, "I mean to say, when one does right, one should not care what the world says."

"Well, Millie, you know I cannot argue with you, and I suppose you know best—but still—"

"See, here is your knitting-cotton," said Millie, turning the conversation; "I bought it at your favourite shop, and it matches to a hair's breadth; and here is a bag of chestnuts —one of the world's wonders—cheap and good. Let us manage the fire so as to roast them on the bars, and then we'll be cosy after dinner; that is if His Serene Highness comes home in a good humour."

A quick ear might have heard a suppressed sigh from Mrs. Farrell—it was her only rejoinder. In truth her two children, with their decided wills and strong energies, were quite emancipated from her control; and I am certain she must very often have felt in sympathetic *rapport* with those unfortunate hens who are set to hatch ducklings, and suffer unutterable trepidations when their web-footed charge take to the water.

Millie swept up the hearth, and lighted the lamp, and drew the curtains, and after a very

simple dressing for dinner, proceeded to lay the cloth with her own fair hands—a duty she usually performed in preference to leaving it to the doubtful digits of the maid-of-all-work. And in due time Charley having arrived, the trio sat down to a plain but well-served meal.

Charley approved of the chestnuts, and as there were two or three glasses of wine remaining from a certain regale of the previous day—of which remainder the ladies declined to partake—he had a very comfortable dessert. Moreover, Mr. Charles Farrel had his sufficient reasons for being in a good humour, for he had learned that day that his uncle—or the governor, as he usually called him—intended, at Christmas time, to raise his salary considerably. Knowing very well that this circumstance was one with which his mother must become acquainted, he took a suitable opportunity of communicating the pleasing intelligence; then, without paying much attention to the prompt congratulations which ensued, he added, "And then, mother, we must look out for something a little more civilized than this hole."

"Oh! Charley!" exclaimed Mrs. Farrell.

"This hole!" repeated Millie, and looking

round the room with a sort of affectionate regard.

"Well—you can do as you like, and stay, if you are so much in love with the place—but, really, I can't stand a second-floor any longer. I want a home where I can ask my friends."

"Oh dear!" sighed Mrs. Farrell, "I never was so comfortable as I have been here."

"Why should you object to living on a second-floor?" asked Millie; "why cannot you invite your friends to call upon you here?"

"What stupid questions you ask," replied the polite brother; "you are just like a woman."

"Of course I am."

"Well, then," continued Charley, "you ought to know that a second-floor in Great Coram Street is not the thing for a man who has to make his way in the world. A second-floor in a good neighbourhood might be borne—but not in the Bloomsbury regions—it's too snobbish; I have lived long enough to know that appearances are everything."

"And I have lived a little longer than you," returned Millie, "and have come to the conclusion that making a false appearance

in the world is one of the greatest mistakes in life."

"I don't want a false appearance—I am not asking you to run in debt."

"Perhaps not; but, Charley, surely it would be wiser to be content with your present mode of living, even if your salary is to be a little increased."

"I don't think so."

"I am sorry we see things so differently."

"It comes to this, Millie, that I am not going to submit to petticoat government. At the same time, I have no wish for a separate home—a thing which you really seem driving at—"

Here Mrs. Farrell shuddered, and Millie looked very grave—while Charley, with a softened tone, proceeded thus:—

"I don't wish it, I don't wish to get into a fast set, or to lead a sort of club life;—it is not half so respectable as a nice little home with one's mother. But, then, I must see my friends sometimes—nothing in the world can be done without connection."

"I tell you frankly," said Millie, "I think we ought to live as cheaply as possible, in order to save Uncle Compton's pocket."

"Hey-day! A new story, that."

"Perhaps so; but I understand money matters better than I did, and I do consider that of late years he has been very kind and generous to us."

"He don't so much as miss what he allows my mother," replied Charley.

"Very likely not; but that does not alter the case."

"Would it do if we could have the first-floor in this house?" meekly suggested the mother.

"Well, it might be a make-shift till we could find something better," replied Charley; "but it is occupied."

"Yes," said Mrs. Farrell, pleased that her idea had not been wholly rebuffed—"Yes, but the occupants are to leave next week."

"Mother, you are a woman of genius," exclaimed her son gaily, and squeezing her arm in token of affectionate approval; "that will just do for the present—I desperately want to give a dinner-party."

"Oh, Charles!"

"Yes I do, and for a 'consideration' the people below would lend us their dining-parlour, and we could do the thing properly. I thought of their lending us a dining-room

before to-day—but it was the coming up here before and after dinner that I could not stand."

Finally, Millie gave in, that is to say, she was silenced, but, as usual, not convinced by her brother's declamations. On her devolved the making a new treaty with the landlady—on her devolved the manifold arrangements connected with the great event of giving a dinner-party; and though she executed all that was demanded from her faithfully and sincerely, it could not be expected that she should do it with the glad alacrity that can lighten only the labour of love.

Millie never felt that Charley's dinner-party was quite a success; and yet he was perfectly satisfied, and his half-dozen guests, all young men, were affable and gay, and apparently well content with their host's hospitality. It was because Millie knew that the plate was hired, and that the crockery did not match, and that an hour before dinner she had seen the confusion of the *cuisine*, that she felt alive to the small *contretemps* which undoubtedly did arise, though probably no one else remarked them. Had not her brother insisted on her presence, I almost believe she would

have masqueraded as a housemaid, for the sake of waiting at table as only people possessed of common sense can do. She, to the best of her ability, drilled the before-mentioned Nancy to assist the white-gloved greengrocer; but memory failed the poor drudge in the hour of need, and Millie at least was conscious of many shortcomings.

Then the first floor, the "drawing-room," though a smarter apartment than the one which they had so long occupied, was really much less cosy and comfortable. Of course, it answered Charley's requirements for his party; but when his mother and sister settled down in it as their own sitting-room, they missed the upstairs cupboards, and found a poor substitute for them in a tawdry, painted chiffonier; and Millie objected to the "drawing-room stove" without hob for a tea-kettle; and she felt in her heart that they were to pay an extra ten shillings a week for a few additional discomforts. Obstinate Millie, who persisted in considering "appearance" as a feathery thing to weigh against comfort; as assuredly it is, unless we clog it with gratified vanity.

However, it was one of Millie's character-

istics to endure with cheerfulness those small ills of life which cannot be cured; although her energetic nature and orderly mind never tamely submitted to misrule even in trifles, if it were in her power to evolve order out of confusion without paying too dearly for the transformation. Thus, when she had fairly given in to her brother's project, she schooled herself to make the best of circumstances; and yet the instinctive distaste she had felt to making a change in their way of living, proved itself in due time to have been the prophetic warning of common sense.

The more extended style of living necessitated an extended scale of expenditure; and the excess exceeded the increase of Charley's contribution to housekeeping very considerably. Millie, who was a careful accountant, soon became aware of the fact; but though it was as clear as figures could make it, her brother persisted in seeing the affair through the fog of his own prejudice and self-will. "It could not be this, and it could not be that, which made the difference," he said, and by dint of declaiming he made Millie submit—to try again. To try to perform a task expected of a good many sisters, and mothers, and wives,

that of making twenty shillings perform the legitimate services of twenty-five.

Of course, in such circumstances—especially when the lord and master of the household is of the type mannish man—the pinching and contriving, the cutting down of already dwarfed superfluities into the very quick of absolute necessities, always begin with the women. Because, habitually, their indulgences are the fewer, therefore shall these indulgences be yet further curtailed. Because, habitually, women are more temperate than men, more patient, more self-denying, their unobtrusive virtues are allowed the amplest tether for their exercise;—and happy is it if the boundary-line which separates a virtue from its corresponding vice remains unpassed.

Ah! in that writhing, seething mass of society called Middle Classes, how many of the women who are rebuked as mean of soul, and narrow of mind, and timorous of spirit, might have been large-hearted, and true, and brave, but for the home-atmosphere of sordid care and petty tyranny in which they have been nurtured! In the moral as well as in the physical world, outward calm is not the

infallible token of inward peace. The air is wholesomest when a breeze is stirring—better even an east wind than none at all; and I hold it to have been an excellent thing for the entire family that Millie Farrell was not quite still and patient under the changed circumstances.

There were two points on which her mind remained firm even to the point of stubbornness. She would neither run into debt, nor would she directly or indirectly appeal to her uncle for further pecuniary assistance. Obviously there was a third course open to her, that of herself earning money to throw into the general fund. But how? That was the question which perplexed this honest, eager-hearted girl, as it has perplexed thousands of sister women who have sought for independence with vain endeavour to break through the enchanted web of conventionalism that caged them for serfdom and penury. Beating against the net often but tightens the knots; though there are tricks for unravelling, and worm-like ways of creeping through the meshes, and brave methods of cutting a pathway with the weapon of wit.

Slowly at first, but latterly crowding fast

and thick upon the mind of the almost self-educated girl, had come that questioning of life and its purposes, its hopes and its duties, which sooner or later always presses on a human soul that has awakened to the sense of its own individuality and responsibility. Her vigorous intellect, unjaded by premature exertion, delighted in continuous exercise; it was not enough to read and to think, and her mental activity had for some time past sought the natural safety-valve of writing. But the crude essays and fragments which had hitherto proceeded from her pen, had never met even the sunlight of sympathetic approval or friendly criticism. This scribbling propensity was Millie's closely-kept secret; the little hidden fire that made her cheek burn when she had heedlessly avowed to her mother that the world was welcome to know all she did. Millie was a severe critic to herself, and at this time her two or three pet productions had only elicited the curious mental commendation, "I think I have seen more stupid things in print."

In print! yes, that is the goal to which each youthful scribbler really looks, though he may deny the ambition almost to his own heart.

Millie, however, answered her own self-questioning very frankly. Her life was singularly companionless; for her thoughts were not the thoughts of her mother and brother, and not the thoughts of her few acquaintances. Not being pretty or accomplished, or forward in manner, she was accustomed to be neglected in society. She knew that her musical attainments were insignificantly small, therefore she never performed; she spoke no language but her own—though she read understandingly one or two others; she did not paint or draw; she did not excel in fancy-work or dance the polka; she was not a toxophilite. Obviously she was not on the young-lady level, and it seemed to be tacitly acknowledged that she fell below it, therefore she was treated accordingly.

Hitherto she had known no true deep sympathy except in books, and in old books chiefly. Bacon and Shakspere, and the Elizabethan dramatists, and Richardson and Goldsmith, were more truly her friends than were any living men and women. The instincts of her mind directed her choice of reading; and if it be objected that this young English girl sometimes selected mental food not

free from foul ingredients, I answer that there are different sorts of taint in books; and that the incidental coarsenesses of certain great old writers, which may be spat out from the mind —so to speak—like the stone from a sweet cherry, seem harmless when compared with the subtle, insidious poison that is distilled from many a modern page which it is thought quite proper to peruse.

It was consistent with Millie's mental condition that she should, perhaps involuntarily, seek to make of herself a link in the chain of sympathy. From the great of old she could receive, while she could give them nothing save love and reverence. But it seemed within her power to scatter and diffuse the rays of intellectual light over those who were yet in the shadow, and who, when they saw what she saw, would come to people her sphere of thought more densely. This instinct to scatter the light, this dull yearning for extended sympathy, make up a large part of what we call literary aspiration.

Millie Farrell had no conceit about her intellectual acquirements; on the contrary, she persisted in believing that long years of study and mental training would still be necessary

to compensate in any degree for the deficiencies of her early education. Nevertheless she had that just confidence in her own powers of perseverance and application, and full trust in their results, without which the most congenial employment soon becomes dismal and depressing toil. And when she calmly and seriously questioned herself what thing there was in the world which she could already do least ill, some index finger at her own heart—like the needle of the compass—always trembled back to one point, where lay the thought, "Write what you think and feel."

Millie had never consciously spoken to any authors in her life, and had some curious notions about their being different from other people, until one day she found herself laughing at the idea that if she became an authoress perhaps people would be frightened of her. For the rest she supposed authors were divided into two classes; those who made enormous sums of money by their writings, and the unfortunates, who, if they had no means of existence but the pen, starved in garrets.

Well, she did not want much money,—a few pounds now and then would make things straight; and perhaps she might earn as much

as that. Accordingly, one day, when her courage was at the highest flood, she despatched four mysterious little packets to four different editors; and without betraying her secret even to her mother, resumed her ordinary avocations, and tried with all her might to feel that nothing particular had been done, and nothing particular was pending.

CHAPTER XI.

MILLIE'S SECRET.

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial."

P. J. BAILEY.

IT was the first of the month, no matter precisely the date, and, though the morning was rainy, Millie Farrell persisted in going to market. She certainly did call on butcher and baker, and reiterated to them orders already received; but if we are to judge from appearances, her real marketing took place at a certain stationer and bookseller's shop in the neighbourhood of her home.

First, she bought a shilling's-worth of writing-paper, and then proceeded to ask the shopkeeper a favour. Might she look at the last number of the "—— Journal" and the "Penny ——?"

Certainly; and the man handed them to her accordingly. Alas! they did not contain a word that concerned or interested her—no, not even in the notice to correspondents. Nevertheless, as she has given the man so much trouble, she considers she must buy these numbers of poor trashy publications which she does not care to read.

"Have you the —— ——?" she asked, in a more timid tone, and naming a work of rather higher pretensions.

It is produced. Her eye falls in a minute upon the last page, and standing out, as if in raised letters, she sees thereon "E. F. declined," and lower down, "The editor cannot undertake to return rejected MSS."

Millie feels a momentary pang—it was such a pet production she had sent to the editor of this work; and she has not kept a quite exact copy! However, she does not buy the broad sheet, but asks now—"Do you sell 'Jerrard's Magazine?'"

"Oh yes, here it is"

And Millie opens the pages of a well-printed, well-got-up magazine, with the stamp of respectability on the cover, and which was conducted by an author of eminence. She

wonders how she could have had the assurance to send her wretched writings—which evidently were too stupid to be printed in the poorest periodicals—to a work of such standing. But at any rate she will know the worst. Surely the editor would not be so cruel as to hold up poor E. F. to printed ridicule and censure—keen-sworded satirist as she knew him to be. She only hopes to find no notice—no notice at all of her rashness.

But the leaves are not cut; only here and there can she see a page, and before she can find if there is any notice to correspondents, she stumbles on a paragraph which she recognises in an instant for her own. It cannot be possible that her article is really printed—really inserted in this admirable magazine. Not conjecturably possible, only it is absolutely true! She purchases the magazine—declines to have it wrapped in paper—and hurries out of the shop. But there is a fascination in those hot-pressed pages; she cannot withdraw her eyes. In the street, plashing along the wet pavement, beneath the shelter of a heavy umbrella, still she looks and reads, and at last finds one important page, on which appears—

"E. F. We hope for further communications from this correspondent. *Honorarium* through the publisher."

And now Millie felt her brain fairly swimming, and she leaned against the door-post of a dingy green-grocer's shop till she could recover her composure. The woman within was polishing and arranging her oranges, but she soon came from behind the counter to recommend the goods at which Millie seemed to be gazing. The motherly dame meant no harm, and did not grudge the shelter of her lintel; but her words startled poor Millie, who, with an absent "No, thank you," turned away from the door. On she walked in the rain, and took a wrong turning, that is to say, wrong if she were going home; but not having decided clearly whither to direct her steps, the wrong turning might chance to be a right one. At any rate it conducted into Holborn, and by the time she arrived there she had decided on going at once to the publisher of "Jerrard's Magazine."

Entirely ignorant of editors and publishers, and of their methods of conducting business, Millie had offered her "article" simply as a commodity for sale, ticketed £1; and she

pictured to herself the bright sovereign that must be awaiting her acceptance. It need not be said how often within the last month she had been tormented with the idea that she had put far too high a price on a dozen sheets of paper, with only her own thoughts written out upon them.

Certainly, as Millie stood in the busy thoroughfare, with dripping umbrella and splashed gown, and laden basket on her arm, "waiting for an omnibus," she looked very little like a young lady who called the stylish Mrs. Blake "Aunt;" and I believe even her brother would have been "shocked" and "ashamed" at her appearance.

In due time the suitable vehicle arrived, and Millie found herself shot into it by the conductor as if she had been an unwieldy parcel. But she was not thinking of comfort, or discomfort, or dignity; her emotions were compounded of something similar to those a child experiences when anticipating, not without particles of dread, some strange mysterious treat—or as if going to the play were to follow a visit to the dentist. What should she say when she reached the publisher's shop? was a question not fairly answered to herself when

she had to alight in Newgate Street and to wend her way—by dint of inquiring—through tortuous labyrinths to Paternoster Row.

Somehow, when she arrived at the veritable spot she was a little braver than she had expected to be. With a voice that only slightly trembled, she addressed a young man who was tying up a parcel of books in the shop, saying—

"I have called in consequence of this notice," and as she spoke she pointed to her initials and the notice in the magazine; "there is something, I believe, for E. F. to receive."

"Walk in, Madam, walk in; I will call Mr. Brown directly," returned the young man, and Millie found herself marshalled now to the right, now to the left, between bales of books that emitted their peculiar, and to her senses pleasant odour. Presently she found herself in a little dingy inner-room, furnished with desks and tall stools, and lighted this dull day with gas, noon though it was. Hardly had she looked round and caught the expression of the place, when the presiding genius entered, and swinging himself on a tall stool behind his desk, motioned to his visitor to be seated also. By a climbing process

Millie was enabled to obey, and from her perch she repeated the words she had already used.

Mr. Brown was a man of about fifty years of age, the hard-working partner of a respectable firm. For the best years of his life he had been confidential clerk, and under the *régime* of his more recently acquired dignity he still performed many of his old duties. No one could accuse him of being a literary man, or of even being literate, for he seldom wrote or spoke with perfect propriety of language. Nevertheless he possessed a marvellous shrewdness of judgment, and penetrated character almost at a glance. He was a thorough man of business—just in his dealings to the letter of justice, and inexorable in expecting absolute good faith in return.

But he was capable of driving his car of Juggernaut without remorse over the vanities and sentimentalities of faithless or incompetent people.

"You come from E. F., I presume," said Mr. Brown; "have you any authority from that author?"

Suddenly it occurred to Millie that she had not only to acknowledge, but to prove her

identity. There was no help for it, and blushing scarlet, she modestly replied, "I am E. F."

Mr. Brown bowed and smiled, and arranged his spectacles, and Millie continued: "Of course, as I am a stranger to you, you may doubt my word, and I am afraid I cannot prove to you that I wrote that article. Yet, perhaps I can; there is one passage a little altered I can tell you what it ought to be—that is to say, I can tell you how I wrote it."

Mr. Brown was quite satisfied. He had profited by thirty years' experience of "literary people," and knew at once that Millie was the veritable E. F., a novice, but one full of promise. Otherwise Mr. Jerrard would not have invited her to communicate with him again; would not have found one "little" alteration in her article alone necessary; and would not have put her down on the list for second-class payment—since only the very great dons received a higher remuneration. Moreover, Mr. Brown was favourably impressed by her appearance. The little nervousness he thought a good sign; and he could not detect in her manner any shade of that fussy importance and conceit which he considered the most in-

fallible token of literary mediocrity. He was decidedly civil; and he knew the most refined compliment he could pay her was to be blind to her inexperience, and treat the whole affair as a matter of course.

"Permit me," he said, taking the magazine from her hand and hastily turning over the pages of her article. "I see," he continued, "rather more than the half-sheet; five pounds eleven and sixpence will be about the mark, at the rate of ten guineas a sheet. Shall I give you a cheque, or would you prefer cash? Cash," he continued, finding that Millie did not answer promptly; "cash will be more convenient, perhaps, as it is such a trifle."

Then holding up the heavy lid of his desk with one hand, with the other he dabbled in a little wooden bowl containing some pounds' worth of silver, and selecting eleven and sixpence, wrapped that sum up in a crisp five-pound note, and presented the little packet to Millie.

"I must trouble you for an acknowledgment," he said, opening a ledger in which there were numerous entries that looked like hieroglyphics to Millie; "write 'Received' and your name just here."

"My name?" exclaimed Millie, interrogatively.

"Your initials, then, if you persist in remaining *incognita;* only in this case, please to add author of such and such an article."

And this was the style and manner in which Millie received her first earnings. How she threaded her way from the dim counting-house, between bales of books, to the front-door, she never clearly remembered; or what it was she replied to the civil young man who proposed sending for a cab, as it was pouring with rain; or of whether she even thanked him for putting up her umbrella for her, she was equally oblivious. All that she could have told you was that she got into the first cab she could find, and as soon as she had pulled up the windows burst into tears—indulging in what women call "a good cry." From which circumstance I divine that the hoar-frost of Millie's "strongmindedness" was not quite proof against the sun-glint of even a small literary success.

CHAPTER XII.

MILLIE FOUND OUT.

"The world! therein lies
The question which, as it is utter'd, implies
All that's fine or that's feeble in thought and intent;
The distinction depends on the *world* that is meant."
OWEN MEREDITH.

THAT sun-glint of success! It certainly warmed into sprouting certain germs of Millie's character, which otherwise might have lain comparatively torpid.

"'Tis pleasant, sure, to see one's name in print;
A book's a book, although there's nothing in't,"

wrote an English bard in the days when authorship and literary life were something very different from what they are at present.

The spread of secular education, and its consequent development of mediocre talent,

gave rise to a popular want, which, according to the unvarying law of demand and supply, has produced, within the last five-and-twenty years, a mass of perishing literature, that is, perhaps, capable of teaching us from its "urn" as valuable lessons as any which it propounded when it seemed to be vital. I mean the mass of periodical writing, and especially that connected with cheap and "peopleish" publications, which, notwithstanding the good it has effected in shedding gleams of knowledge where otherwise none might have penetrated, is perhaps mainly answerable for those habits of desultory reading and superficial thinking which at present so widely prevail, and are as dead-weights on the really aspiring soul.

Once upon a time, "to read" and "to study" were nearly synonymous terms; but now a large proportion of readers seek only to be amused, and very positively, though perhaps unconsciously, decline any but the gentlest exercise of their own faculties while perusing some "new number" or "railway volume." I have watched such readers skipping articles, or even paragraphs, which even at the first glance they pronounced "heavy," simply because,

from a habit of mental laziness, they shrank from rousing up their own faculties to meet and appropriate the author's meaning. Such half-awake readers retain little more impression of what they read than they do of the memory of a dream—both recollections are likely to be feeble and misty, and ill-defined in outline. Such is always the knowledge of the desultory and superficial reader, the devourer of periodical light literature, with a smattering of great books by means of review articles.

I am not throwing stones at these poor intellectual lotos-eaters—only paper pellets at worst; and there is One who knows how many men and women there are so jaded in mind and body by daily care and over-toil, that an hour of real mental application might be the additional ounce of burthen too much to bear. They claim as right the light literature that shall gently unbend the strained bow; and may it ever be wholesome and refreshing to them! Would they could keep the fountain a little more to themselves and its proper uses!

The True Student is the *rara avis* of modern life, notwithstanding the acres of print that

roll out of our steam-printing presses, and the clatter of tongues of "talented people" that one hears on every side. It is the age of Talk—and few have time to think and to listen to the still small voice that speaks to us in the calm of meditation. Now, in strict accordance with the demand and supply law, a host of writers, a very army, has arisen, who make of authorship a matter-of-fact profession. Not they of the *genus irritabile*, dependent on a thousand airy influences for their inspiration; but these personages have their writing time of the day, just as the lawyer has his office-hours; they write books by contract; pass through their facile brains, by dint of cramming, new and needful knowledge just when required—then wipe it away as one does the writing on a slate; they can even acquire a modern language in a few weeks for translating purposes; as I have heard a facile learner declare he had done. All which deeds might be applauded or forgiven, if the perpetrators knew themselves for what they are—artisans, and not artists. If they had less vanity and more reverence, and for one thing left off measuring merit by the money recompense it gets in this world; left off writing

and talking about Goldsmith, Chatterton, and some others as "brothers of the pen," with curious disquisitions on the infirmities of genius—confounding brain-work and soul-work in a distressing, because most false and mischievous manner.

It was a sign Millie Farrell belonged to "her age," that she so instinctively attached a money value to her literary attempts; and when one small success after another gave her encouragement and confidence, there is no wonder that she fell naturally into the habit of writing for publication. And she wrote quite as well—and sometimes much better than did such average contributors to periodical light literature as I have endeavoured to describe. It was also observed that she had a style of her own. A certain silver thread seemed to run through her little essays and stories, and to distinguish them more effectually than did her common-place initials. I take it this was to be accounted for by the fact that Millie had never been a reader of trash. When she became a student, she communed almost entirely with master minds. Her excellent common sense—and somebody has called genius only the sublime of common

sense—was never dwarfed or crippled; so that she looked at life, and the life-dramas acting around her, more broadly than young women are generally capable of doing. Not loving to contemplate the minute and frivolous details of common-place events, she nevertheless often seized the clues that they afforded, and followed them bravely out to the very horizon of the visible,—sometimes taking a bold leap a little way beyond. Thus when she chose subjects of passing popular interest, not having contracted the watery style engendered by much reading of the same—monotonous as the rippling of water, and good for sending invalids to sleep—there is no wonder that her productions had a degree of original, if only ephemeral merit.

I ought, perhaps, to have described Millie's interview with her mother, when she confided the great secret of her "literary success" to Mrs. Farrell—after a solemn promise to keep the secret faithfully. A promise the mother was not altogether loth to fulfil, for, foolish woman as she had been on nine occasions out of ten in her life, there did sometimes come the happy moment when the lamp of good judgment flickered up in her mind. This was

one such moment, and she saw distinctly, that if the money Millie could earn was really to do them good, Charley must know nothing at all about it. Will the reader please to imagine this little scene—with Mrs. Farrell's surprise, delight, and motherly exclamations; and Millie's half-laughing, half-tearful explanations? For I need to hurry on towards other events. First, however, the following incident must be described; an incident which happened some months later, and, alas! for human plans and purposes, overthrew or disarranged divers of Millie Farrell's projects.

By this time our young *literata* was an established contributor to Jerrard's Magazine; and her monthly visits to the friendly publisher were looked upon as quite pleasant episodes in her life. Now they shook hands at meeting, and usually had a little animated chat of some sort. Often Mr. Brown would point out some newspaper notice of the magazine, in which Millie's productions were mentioned, and more than once he suggested a subject for her to treat. Gradually the awkwardness of preserving her *incognito* under these genial circumstances became more and more appa-

rent, and one day in sending her communication to the editor, she gave her full name and home address, timidly and yet earnestly entreating that he and Mr. Brown would keep the secret quite inviolate. She "had reasons many and most important that it should be so, besides what they probably supposed a natural womanly shrinking from publicity—et cetera—et cetera."

Now it was laid down in Millie's destiny, that a very unusual circumstance should likewise happen that day. Her brother forgot himself and his personal comfort and interests so far as to be guilty of what people call an "imprudence," got wet feet, or something of the sort, by which he took a severe cold; towards evening he was really ill, and the next morning not well enough to go to business. However, about noon he rose—installed himself in an easy chair by the fire—early winter had come round again—and sending to the circulating library for a new book of the jaunty-satirical school, prepared to indulge himself with a look at human nature through that knotted-glass-smoked medium.

Mrs. Farrell was engaged in the undignified

occupation of stocking-mending, and Millie was likewise employed in needlework—which she did not love too well, which she could execute, however, if need be, as dexterously as fingers that never corrected a proof-sheet—but which she rarely took up in solitude for mere amusement. She had no taste for fancy work—and her hemming and sewing to-day were of the necessary serviceable sort, straightforward too—without eccentric details to absorb the mind with countings and contrivings. In short, it was that tolerable and "to be endured" needlework that moves on half mechanically, without stitching down the thoughts. Millie, in fact, while she worked, was nicely arranging in her mind the warp threads for some future literary weaving.

Presently the maid-of-all-work entered the room, holding a card as if it were something dainty and delicate, by the corner of an apron not much cleaner than the fingers it shielded.

"A gentleman, ma'am," said Nancy, as she jerked the card on to the table; and when Mrs. Farrell was about looking at it, Nancy added, "It was Miss he asked for."

Millie had good sight and had seen across

the table what name was on the card;—delight, confusion, vexation at her brother's presence—regret at not having a second sitting-room—robbing her altogether of presence of mind. She turned deadly pale—as she repeated after her mother "Show him up—show him up."

Meanwhile Charley had possessed himself of the card, and read thereon the name MR. HORACE JERRARD. Upon which discovery Mr. Charles Augustus shaped his lips towards the enunciation of a whistle of astonishment; but happily restrained the sound of it, as he glanced round at his mother and sister, noticing the embarrassment of the latter, with a look that said plainly, "I have caught you out in some mystery hidden from me."

For Horace Jerrard's was a name familiar as household words—it meant the wit, the satirist, the dramatist, who could melt you to love and pity by the pathos he extracted out of the homeliest incidents; and yet that name frightened people sometimes by the nine-times knotted scourge of sarcasm which its owner always kept ready to his hand—that is his tongue or pen.

Of course it was Millie who advanced to

meet the visitor; and she found the one hand she extended clasped in both of his, as he exclaimed for greeting, "So I have caught the bird I have been spreading lime for so long."

What could Millie do but laugh—as she murmured "My mother—my brother," by way of introduction?

Mr. Horace Jerrard was a little man with a stoop—a roundness of the shoulders that almost amounted to deformity, but the head set upon those shoulders was magnificent. Long, thick, soft light hair beginning to fade towards white, and somewhat inclined to porcupine arrangement—though laws of gravity would not allow such a mass to stand quite erect—rose from a brow whose curves suggested and satisfied the highest ideal of human intellect. Moreover, the brow had that peculiar look of fulness—as if it were always growing and pushing forward the outer covering—which I have never noticed except in the heads of working thinkers. Beneath that brow there shone a pair of light blue eyes, bright, prominent, and piercing; capable of many varied expressions, among them of a surprised look, as if the soul were

by nature sphered in some diviner element, and did by momentary snatches feel strange in the murky atmosphere of the world. The lower part of the face was less remarkable, but the generous mouth opened freely in speech or laughter, revealing a good set of even teeth.

Horace Jerrard measured Mr. Charles Augustus at a glance; partly by the rather elaborate dressing-gown and fashionable neck-tie that he wore, and the title of the book he had just thrown down; but much more by that strong effluence which seems to arise and wreath itself into the mystical something called first impression. Those blue eyes had a sort of lightning power that burnt away all thin disguises and pierced to the very heart of character. He measured also pretty accurately the calibre of the good "house-mother"—disturbed at her stocking-mending, half seeking, yet not daring, to scuttle her work apparatus out of sight; and the wit treated her with marked consideration and respect, though he could not refrain from making one of his poorest jokes about the comparative sharpness of women's needles and women's tongues.

But his conversation was chiefly addressed

to Millie, whom he called "child," and treated with a sort of half-fatherly tenderness, just dashed by the proper chivalrous respect of man towards woman. Millie's momentary agitation once passed, she felt quite surprised at the composure which succeeded it. Never before had Millie conversed freely with any particularly intellectual man, and assuredly such a luminary as Horace Jerrard had never crossed her path. Yet here she was talking and listening to his talk, about many things which had lain like sacred treasures at her heart, unspoken of for want of sympathy. She felt ten times less embarrassed than if her uncle Blake had been trying to draw her out. Her merest suggestions seemed thoroughly understood, and to be caught up, and given back to her the next minute fully elaborated, though crisped probably into an epigram.

Millie expressed her delight that he wished her to write constantly for his magazine, but hoped he would still carefully preserve her *incognito*.

"Oh, certainly, my child, if you wish it," he said. "I will be dumb, or better still, mysterious; not even talking with the fingers, as the dumb do. I have not the least objec-

tion to dimity in the magazine, so long as it is hidden; and to tell you the truth, I have more of it than people think. The public believes in broad-cloth, and likes to be deceived. By the-bye, I wish you would do a little of the reviewing for me."

"Oh, Mr. Jerrard, I should not presume to review a book."

"Not a cookery book, perhaps—that would be too abstruse—but women are the best reviewers of modern light literature—because they are so honest, they really read the books."

"How can anyone review a book without reading it?" asked Millie, looking up as she spoke with grave and innocent surprise.

The blue eyes sparkled with mirth as their owner replied with assumed gravity. "There are many sorts of reviewers—the monkey sort, which delights to mock, and to tear a fine fabric to pieces; the bat sort, uncomfortable in broad daylight, and abusive of the sun; the rat sort, that loves to nibble in the dark, and was never known to prop a falling house—though there might be timbers worth saving; and happily there is also the eagle sort, with the keen vision that from its eyrie can look down and discover at a glance what

is worthy of being lifted into the empyrean of fame. But the multitudinous common sort are the chameleon tribe, whose opinions take some accidental colourings. Do you know there are reviewers who could not conscientiously praise a book published by Messrs. T——, others who are bound in honour to snub all works ushered forth by P. and V. ?"

"But why is this, Mr. Jerrard?"

"Because T——'s 'Saturday Infallible' is the rival of P. and V.'s 'Weekly Incorruptible,' and merit or demerit always appears at a different focus in these publications."

Millie looked amazed, and indeed only half comprehended what her visitor was talking about, but she said—"Surely, Mr. Jerrard, there are often just reviews of books, or how could people be guided by them?"

"I hope there are just criticisms sometimes —and always, you know, in Jerrard's Magazine, or I should not attempt to enlist a lady reviewer," he added with playful irony. "Now tell me," he continued, "if I were to send you a new book with a gentle hint that 'it would never do,' would you take the hint and display all your own cleverness in attempting to prove the new book very silly?

By dint of judicious extracts and dashing off into much irrelevant matter, the review of a really stupid book may be made very amusing —much more easily may something slashing be said about a book not stupid. Now could you take the hint,—that is what I want to know?"

"Certainly not," answered Millie, "unless, on examining the work, my own opinions coincided with the hint received. Because though you might know better than I what should be said, the task being confided to me I should be the responsible person—should be responsible for saying what I conscientiously thought."

"Good."

"And it is because I feel this, and that I might very often be wrong, that I should be afraid to write a review—it could only be my opinion, you see."

"And what do you suppose any review is but the 'my opinion' of 'somebody?'"

"Of course—but then it is the opinion of some very clever and experienced person."

"Which clever and experienced person is very often a mere puppet—though sometimes he does not know it—pulled this way and that by different and often conflicting interests

and feelings; party spirit, prejudice, unconscious envy, born of disappointment, and the worrying phantom, consistency. Now, my dear child, what do you suppose is the object of a literary review?"

"To direct the public taste."

"Does it do this?—I think not permanently. I am not speaking of grand literary essays written by master-minds, generally about dead authors, or, at all events, authors of established fame—which essays themselves take rank among the classics of our language:—but I mean the current newspaper and magazine criticisms of new books. I do not deny that this sort of writing is able to bring a new work into notice, but only true merit can keep its hold on the public mind. Now it is because you are young and fresh, not soured by disappointments, and not pledged away from the paradoxes of truth by any phantom of consistency, that I think you would be quick to appreciate merit and to distinguish between the true and the false—in fact, to forestal the public verdict. Say what you think fearlessly—that is just what I want from you. I will take care not to send you anything beyond your powers."

"I do not think, Mr. Jerrard, that you know how very ignorant I am—or you would not make this proposal," said Millie with real humility, though it must be confessed her resolution was a little shaken.

"Oh, yes, I do, I saw it from the first; I have no doubt a common-place boarding-school young lady would beat you entirely with her chronologies, and conchologies, and all the rest of her dry bones of knowledge. The difference is, that what knowledge you have is not dry and dead, but always capable of being vivified and made useful. Then I must tell you, Brown has the fixed idea that you could write capital stories for children, and he is going to ask you to write a volume for his Juvenile Series. But I have nothing to do with that—he must talk to you about it himself."

Mr. Horace Jerrard was too busy a man to pay long morning visits, but it was surprising how many subjects he touched on in the course of twenty minutes or half-an-hour. To Millie it was as if he tossed into light and sunshine many precious things whose worth she had hitherto but half apprehended. Yet, as for really remembering precisely what

he said, it was about as difficult as retaining in one's mind the exact zig-zag of forked lightning. No doubt his profound knowledge of character had enabled him, by means of Millie's papers and little notes, to understand not only her literary powers, but her personal aims, pretty accurately; and it was quite evident he had faith in her, and moreover felt a kindly interest about her. Horace Jerrard's utter abhorrence of shams, and of the mere show of conventionalities, made him indifferent to the world's opinion, consequently he was often misunderstood, and if people chose to paint caricatures of him, he took no trouble to correct them by a true portrait. Bitter as gall, burning as caustic, he could be, and was; but only to triumphant wickedness or superb folly. The wit by which he brought to sight mere human weaknesses and frailties was harmless as summer lightning: while the true pity and sympathy he had ever ready for undeserved suffering was simply inexhaustible. Out of this unfathomable well came the pathos which tempered his wit into humour, and so reached the hearts of old and young, of wise and simple, of rich and poor.

As he was taking leave he exclaimed, "One

word more, my dear child. Don't you let old Brown drive a hard bargain with you; he'll try, you may be sure. I'll take care you are not humbugged about what you do for the magazine. Good morning, Madam—good morning, Sir—good-bye, my dear young lady; I shall send you a cart-load of new books next week."

Notwithstanding his bad cold, Charley did the very polite by seeing the guest downstairs, for Charley never lost an opportunity of being civil to people of consideration.

Meanwhile Millie had turned, by a sort of instinct, to kiss her mother, and before their interlacing arms were unwound, both their cheeks were wet. I know not what broken words passed between them, but the kiss and the tears were an acknowledgment of thankfulness—on the one side for the means of independence being thus opened—on the other for the tardy recognition of the merits of a child whom the mother accused herself of having hitherto not fully valued. Oh! the magic of success! It couches the eyes even of the fondest. And if the poor humble-minded mother required this operation, need we wonder that it was a thick film which had

been removed from the mental vision of the brother?

After closing the door on Millie's distinguished visitor, Charley re-ascended the stairs at a very leisurely pace. Acting on impulse was a weakness of which he was rarely guilty, for his mind moved rapidly, and often mounted a steep ladder of probable causes and effects in that minute of time in which a simpler nature would be giving way to its feelings. He was not in a very good humour with himself, for he perceived that he had made an enormous blunder in his estimate of his sister; and, moreover, for the last half-hour he had had the mortification of being treated as an altogether secondary and inferior personage to her. But self-interest was strong enough to overrule temper, at least so far as to restrain the display of it, and he re-entered the room with a smiling countenance. Millie need no longer fear from him contemptuous talking at, bullying, or teasing. The tiny musquito booms out his little trumpet note of warning or triumph; the vampire bat fans—and fans his victim to sleep before he sucks the life-blood.

"What a brute I have often been to you," exclaimed the brother, seating himself by

Millie's side, and passing his arm round her as he spoke; "and what a fool to have quizzed you as I have. But I hope the great authoress will forget and forgive."

"Great authoress!" cried Millie; "nay, I think it is now you are quizzing me worse than ever. I feel more humbled and frightened than vain, I can assure you, after all that Mr. Jerrard has said to me. If it is only his good nature that sees merit in my little doings—and I undertake tasks I am too stupid and ignorant to perform—what will become of me? And now he and Mr. Brown know who I am! Oh, Charley, be sure you keep my secret, and don't tell anybody in the world what I do."

"Well—well, depend upon me. Only, really I cannot see why you should make such a mystery. I am sure I feel quite proud of you already—"

"Proud of what?" interrupted Millie; "you have not read any of my writings. I kept them out of your sight, lest I should betray myself."

Charley coloured, but quickly recovered his composure, saying, "I am proud that Mr. Jerrard has such a high opinion of your

talents; I am sure he must be a much better judge than I could have been. And why on earth should he have inserted your papers, and made all this fuss about you, if they had not been really clever. Now, where are they, and what are they about? I am dying to see them."

Charley read and praised—for when true merit is pointed out, most eyes can see it. He praised, although some of Millie's literary productions, and Mr. Jerrard's magazine generally, swung the pendulum of certain opinions in a direction contrary to that he had often advocated; and then, by dint of the process skilfully performed, but only to be described by the vulgar phrase—pumping—he extracted from Millie the information he required touching the amount of money she had earned—forming from that confession his own estimate for the future.

Later in the day the subject was resumed.

"Forty pounds in six months, and you have bought nothing with it that I see. Why, how rich you must be!"

Millie shook her head. "All gone in paying bills, I assure you. It is just by that much our expenses have exceeded our income this year."

"Millie, you are to be the making of me, I really believe. If I can but keep up an appearance for a few years—launch out you would call it—you will see what I shall do."

"So you always say, but I don't understand you. I can comprehend that it is necessary for Uncle Blake to give dinner parties—and receive foreigners when they bring letters of introduction—and to do many things of that sort; but for you, who are only a clerk, it seems to me that, so long as you kept within your income, it could not signify where you lived. And as for asking young men home to dinner as you do—"

"Young men—yes," interrupted Charley, "and yet not my juniors. Young men who have already the start of me in life—young friends who will soon be partners of fathers or brothers in great houses of business."

"The very reason, it seems to me, that they could better afford to entertain you, than you them."

"No doubt they could."

"If," continued Millie, "if, on the contrary, they were poorer than we, I could understand you better, and then I would make any sacrifice to be hospitable."

"My poor Millie, with all your cleverness, how little you know of the world! When I am rich it will be time enough to think of helping others—at present I cannot afford to be so generous. I must rise myself before I can pull others up, and to do this I must make connection, and the only way I can do it is to cultivate the friendship of those who have a little the start of me; they are likely to help me better than older or grander people, who are, as it were, too far off for my purpose."

"Charley!" exclaimed his sister, with a visible shudder, "your idea of friendship seems to me horrible."

Charley bit his lip, and became aware that he had a difficult path to tread; all the honesties and generosities of Millie's nature bristled up like brambles in his way.

"My dear girl," he exclaimed, "you must not put a harsh construction on what I tell you in the frankest confidence. If a fellow forms one or two perfectly disinterested friendships in his life, he may think himself lucky, and my time has not come yet; meanwhile, the choice lies between using one's acquaintances or their using us—and at pre-

sent I am too poor to hesitate which it shall be. Of course, there is not another creature I would speak to in this manner, but it seems to me that you are destined to help me to fortune. Now don't cry—how can you be so foolish, now our prospects are so bright?"

Millie would have found it hard to say why she wept, she only knew that the exhilaration of the morning had given place to a sense of depression, a cold weight of indecision at her heart; indecision which, except remorse, is, perhaps, the most miserable condition of the human mind. Millie's nature was generous, and her brother's argument specious; and yet there was a half-articulate utterance of her reason which told her that Charley's views of life were false, and that if she followed his leading she would soon find herself confused and lost in the cross-roads and labyrinths of life. On the other hand, the world is full of fascination to the young and inexperienced; and half unconsciously to herself, Millie thirsted for a certain amount of what is called pleasure and enjoyment—kindly intercourse with pleasant people, and the interchange of ideas in society.

I know not how much Millie Farrell con-

ceded to her brother's wishes, or how much her own aims and desires gradually became confused and divided. She, whom insolence or tyranny would have braced to firmness and indignation, was assuredly lulled and led by soft words and small kindnesses. Not that she was insensible to the fact that her brother regarded her for her uses—but then, she argued, are we not all liked for something, if we could but get clearly at the causes of loving? And then home was so much brighter when lighted by smiles, that her spirits rose and her energies developed—until she found she could accomplish twice as much literary work as she expected. Certain it is that a few months after Mr. Jerrard's first visit to Great Coram Street, the Farrells removed to more commodious apartments, and Millie settled to the life of a working author, drudgery and excitement, success and disappointment, alternating pretty evenly.

I have said that of latter years her mind had been more cultivated than her heart; not that her heart was cold or narrow, far otherwise—but the Spiritual Life of her being—that Light in the Sanctuary which might have shed its beams so far as to make all duties clear, as yet flickered feebly, and was overpowered by

more lurid lights. As under these circumstances her mind expanded, she began to deify the Human; at the same time her imaginary standard of human excellence had risen without her having found any near object she could alike reverence and love. A common enough state of things this, when the intellect is in a state of ferment—when, from time to time, opinions are being formed and clung to obstinately for a while, though destined ultimately to give place to new and even opposite ideas. For opinions, however obstinate, based upon mere human knowledge and acquirements, are but like writings on the sea-shore, which the next wave of thought may efface.

And so time passed on—and Millie wrote and wrote—sometimes excellent sense, sometimes crudities, even unconsciously falsities, to which the sparkle of her style lent a specious gloss. The mask of the anonymous soon slipped half aside; Millie became recognised as a literary star of about the third magnitude, and had the *entrée* to a certain literary set. No doubt Charley improved his connection; in fact it was pleasant to visit at the Farrells'—they knew so many clever people.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COLLEGIANS.

"Oxford! * * * yet so famous,
So excellent in art * * * * * *
That Christendom shall ever speak his virtue."

SHAKSPERE.

THE beautiful city of Oxford! who that has wandered among its cloisters, even for a few hours, been gay with its gaiety, or grave and meditative in its shadow, can ever forget its unique charm? Far less can they ever grow cold in its praise who have dwelt in its precincts long enough for the rhythm of its song to be perpetually audible. To such the mere word—the name—can at all times revive the presence and the melody—just as at our inland fire-side an exiled shell can recall the voice of the ocean. The song of the City of Oxford!

Why does not some poet-son of the beloved Alma Mater translate to articulate speech the hum of its music?

It was a day late in the spring, or early in the summer, whichever you please to call it; that season which painters for the most part despair of depicting, and which, therefore, small artists tutor themselves to despise. They tell you that at this period the outlines of nature are hard and precise, and her colours not mellow; and yet the outlines enchant one's sense of form, and the delicate greens, and the pale pinks—pale, but full-blooded, not faded—bathe the eyes with beauty. Of course, the outline fresh from nature's hand—as yet unserrated by ruin—scorns imitation by the 'prentice hand; and the tassels of the chestnut, the blossoming rods of the almond, the tresses of the laburnum, and the chiming bells of the odorous lilac, may well exhaust the resources even of the master's palette. Besides, at this season London is crowded, and painters suffocate in hot galleries, or must be at home to receive patrons and commissions. Between such causes and effects there is a magnetic wire not yet broken.

In a certain college garden that lovely day

a group of young men had assembled; and, indeed, it seemed the place and hour of a rendezvous, as one gownsman after another joined the party. Our old acquaintance, Godfrey Sutton, now a young man turned twenty, was lounging on a garden chair, and quenching the scent of a neighbouring hawthorn by the fumes of his cigar, while one or two companions stood near, or when restless trod down the daisies that starred the well-kept turf. Beyond the girdling trees, and sharply defined against the summer sky, uprose many a spire and tower and pinnacle, each with a history as well as a beauty of its own; but the Oxonians of whom we are speaking were not looking skyward just then, or ruminating on historic or legendary lore. They were boon companions, with that certain affinity of "feather" which led them to "flock together," and were planning various schemes of present pleasure, and speculating on the doings of the approaching vacation.

"How about your brother?" exclaimed one of these choice spirits, addressing Godfrey; "what will he be doing next week?"

"Reading pretty hard, you may be sure," was the prompt rejoinder.

"I must say, Sutton," returned the other, "that it is a rich joke your being supposed to direct and look after the young one. Well, I suppose it is all right; only be grateful, my boy, and thank your lucky stars that you are the first-born, and not expected to toil at a profession."

"I am thankful,—that you may be sure; though you don't know how I am bored at home with lectures about the duties of position, and the responsibilities of property, as if one didn't know all that sort of thing as a matter of course. Upon my life I sometimes think it was a dodge of the old people to enter Edgar here before I left, that he might be a spur to urge me on—or perhaps a spy to look after me, under the pretence of his being taken care of by his elder."

"Nay—nay, there's nothing of the spy about Edgar."

"No, of course not, consciously. But you would not think what chums he and my mother are; he writes home every three or four days, and I should not wonder if his letters are as full of matter-of-fact detail as a girl's diary."

"I don't think it; more likely full of fan-

ciful and fantastic descriptions of what he sees here. You know what he calls Oxford, don't you?"

"No, what is it?"

"The Sleeping Beauty—lately roused out of her long lethargy—not, though, by the kiss of one lover, but by the importunity of many. She is not to wed pure Puseyism, however—that he has decided."

"What an odd boy it is!—but speak of—"

"The sun, and his rays appear," returned the other. "There he is, and walking with Rivingstone of Christchurch, by all that's comical!—Why, when did those two come together?"

"Oh, they met at a wine-party at old Serle's, about a week ago, and have been like Damon and Pythias ever since."

"We all thought Rivingstone would have been master of the 'Towers' by this time."

"Not he—the lordship may be long enough deferred. It is true his grandfather is nearly eighty, but the old man means to live another quarter of a century, I make no doubt. And then, you know, all is not fair sailing."

"So I have heard—but here they come;" and as Arthur Rivingstone and Edgar Sutton

approached within earshot, salutations, more or less familiar, passed between them and the other young men.

Godfrey and Edgar Sutton would not have been taken by a stranger for brothers, though, on close acquaintance, the certain something called family-likeness was clearly traceable. Both had regular well-cut features; both had light brown hair; but Godfrey was taller than his brother, and, though really not more healthy and robust, looked the more athletic of the two. In the eyes, however, was the great dissimilarity observable, for those of Godfrey were hazel, dashed with the tawny colouring of his hair, and shaded by lashes which, like the eyebrows, were of a much darker shade. Edgar's eyes were more oval in shape, and of that peculiar blue grey which is, perhaps, capable of more varied expression than any other, and which often indicates the sensitive and sympathetic temperament that, if allied to intellect, makes genius.

Arthur Rivingstone, the patrician born—tracing a lineal descent from Plantagenet kings, and with other rills of royalty flowing through his ancestry—was not, at the first glance, so aristocratic-looking a personage as

either of the Suttons—who, be it remembered, traced to only a couple of grandfathers. Arthur's features were not very regular; his brow seemed broad rather than high, unless you noted that the arch of the head, in the region which phrenologists devote to the moral sentiments, was faultless as we see it in the feminine type of perfection; clustering, dark, waving locks shaded that white, broad brow, and eyes of the intense blue of a southern sky were the finest features in the face. Soft, and yet luminous, capable of the utmost tenderness of expression, and yet of passionate indignation, they were eyes which once remarked were never forgotten. The mouth was larger than is reconcileable with established ideas of beauty; and yet it was not coarse; rather was it the mouth that usually accompanies the open hand. In figure he was lithe and graceful, looking somewhat less than his age, which, in reality, was nearly twenty.

"Well, my peripatetics," exclaimed Godfrey to the new-comers, throwing away the end of his cigar as he spoke, "what new philosophies are you cogitating to-day?"

"Nothing new," replied Rivingstone, per-

ceiving Godfrey's tone of banter, but not in the least resenting it, "nothing new; on the contrary, the very common speculation how best to enjoy ourselves."

"Come on the water with us," said Godfrey; "we are going to have a race."

"Thank you, not to-day," answered Rivingstone; "my little May Queen is being painted, and it would seem a sort of faithlessness to use another boat instead of waiting till she has finished her toilette. Besides, I have an engagement," he added, glancing at Edgar.

"Mr. Serle is going to devote the afternoon to us," exclaimed Edgar, "and you know he is a walking Cyclopedia of Antiquarian Knowledge."

"*A son goût!*" cried Godfrey, shrugging his shoulders. "For my part, I don't cultivate my tutor's society out of reading hours."

"I do," said Rivingstone, "and, indeed, Mr. Serle is my very particular friend."

It will be perceived that Arthur Rivingstone had a quiet manner of warding off impertinence, and keeping mere acquaintances at a suitable distance. Presently Mr. Serle entered the gardens, and his two young friends passed on to meet him. Mr. Serle was a gentlemanly

man of four or five and thirty, who had held a fellowship for the last few years, had taken high honours, and was greatly in request as a tutor of first-rate ability. A ripe scholar, he was something else also. Early in life circumstances had made him acquainted with the world, and he knew men as well as books. Rare union of knowledge, and yet the one absolutely necessary to the true Teacher. Few poor gentlemen ever had so many rich and influential friends as Marmaduke Serle, and church preferment might have been his long ago; but something whispered at his heart, "Not yet—not yet—at present your Service is here."

It is not necessary to follow the trio in their long ramble that holiday afternoon; the facts which Mr. Serle communicated to his young companions, when they came to spots of historic interest, are of course patent to every student, while the manner in which wisdom was grafted on knowledge by the felicity of his *àpropos* is not to be reproduced by description.

"What a glorious day we have had!" exclaimed Edgar Sutton to Rivingstone, when they had parted from their elder companion.

"It is always a glorious time when one gets Mr. Serle to talk," replied Arthur.

"How I wish we could have him at Sutton," returned Edgar; "my father would be charmed with him."

Arthur shook his head as he said, "You may try—but he is the hardest man in the world to catch. His vacations are usually devoted to his mother and brother: the latter being a hard-working London clergyman, who, they say, can at times preach wonderful sermons. But you remember the Church of England calls itself a praying not a preaching church, and I have noticed that an Anglican priest who greatly attracts by his sermons, is apt to get pelted with nicknames."

"The more's the pity; for seeing how seldom the offence occurs, I think it might be pardoned; especially as there are few of us who do not need the preacher. However," Edgar continued, "I am writing home to-day, and I shall tell my mother that you, at any rate, have promised to come to us."

"What will your brother say?" said Arthur, laughing; "though you see how we spar, he asked me last year to visit his home, and I declined."

"Last year and this year are different," returned Edgar: "however, my mother is coming to the Commemoration; and when she asks you herself, I shall tell her not to let you refuse. You might send down the May Queen by rail; for we have quite a lake at our place, full of fish, and first stocked, they say, by the old monks. And we, like the Lady Geraldine,

'* * * * have some purple shades at gloaming,
Which are worthy of a king in state, or poet in his youth.'

You see I plead for Sutton more boldly than I can for myself."

"What a glorious day we have had!" exclaimed Godfrey to his companions as they parted late in the summer night, when a waning moon cast broad lights and shadows in the quadrangle of their college, and gave to the quaint gargoyles a sort of galvanised life. And the word "glorious" was caught up and repeated all round.

Godfrey, who was always short of money, had won some pounds by the boat race, and in doing so had abused his physical strength

far beyond the limits of wholesome exercise; while he had kept at bay sensations of exhaustion and fatigue, by the stimulants of wine and gay society: the latter having proved in their turn incentives to acts of wanton mischief, and the perpetration of stupid practical jokes.

Pleasure and Glory! what different meanings have these two words to different minds! And seeing that a certain unclean animal is stone-blind to the beauty of pearls, why should we provoke him to return and rend us—why bestow on him a pity he does not desire? Let him go his way—you will only get spattered with mud if you even approach too near; doubtless he enjoys—why interfere? Mind only your own business.—These are the lazy worldling's opiates of advice which lead us to travel on in the broad way, and not to make of ourselves a brother's keeper.

But the narrow way!—the way which brings warfare at every step, and is a life-long battle to tread! Victory on that path is not gained by let-alone and non-intervention.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GIRL ARTIST.

"It is only the young who can receive much reward from men's praise; the old, when they are great, get too far beyond and above you to care what you think of them. * * * * They can be kind to you, but you nevermore can be kind to them."—RUSKIN.

REMOVING to a new home! What a circle of associations to most minds the idea calls up! If the move be an advance in social position, hope and imagination are alike busy, and even a well-regulated mind has to crush down a tribe of little vanities and selfishnesses which are seen to arise, born of new wants and the contempt of old things. But Mrs. Compton Blake had not a well-regulated mind, and, therefore, the vanities and selfishnesses not being "seen" by her, were not crushed, but allowed to grow and flourish.

For two or three years she had been of opinion that the house in Curzon Street was small and mean, and altogether very unfit for occupation by a man in her husband's position; and by dint of perpetually reiterating her sentiments, she had apparently endued Mr. Blake with them. At all events he had yielded to her wishes, and had taken a stately mansion in the neighbourhood of Belgrave Square. Painters and paperers, upholsterers and gilders—how busy, and yet how dilatory they were! Mrs. Blake had been cruelly treated by them—she said so with tears in her eyes. They had led her to believe that everything should be ready before Easter, and here was the end of May, half "the season" over, and the most important promises still unfulfilled. The delicate paper of a special pattern, the dies to be broken up after use, was not yet ready: and those stupid Spitalfields people, who were making the satin damask for her boudoir, had sent home a fabric of horrid scarlet instead of rich crimson. Of course she could not have two reds in a room —and the tints of the carpet were perfect— and besides, that shade of colour would make even a milk-maid look pale.

Meanwhile, confusion reigned in the old house. Several of the most costly articles of furniture had been sent away to be refurbished, and picture frames to be regilt; the house seemed half dismantled, and not fit for a visitor to enter. Mrs. Blake rushed about the London world eating dinners—she said, like a pauper—without being able to return them, and going to balls and evening parties without giving any herself. To be sure, her friends listened to her sad tale, and compassionated her accordingly; while she solaced herself with visions of what she would do next year. Even now, if those wretched tradespeople would only have a little feeling, they might get things done in time for her to be settled sufficiently to give one grand ball and house-warming before town was quite empty. This hope became a fixed idea with her, and as she bent all the energies of her mind to the one purpose, there seemed, after awhile, a probability that she would realize it.

There was, however, one minute portion of the old house sacred from the harpies of disorder; and that was Agnes Bendoran's little bed-chamber. Its furniture was too common and insignificant to be yet disturbed; and,

indeed, as Mrs. Blake had not entered the room for several years, she had not given a thought to it lately. And yet there was an air almost of elegance about that little attic. The servants of the household were fond of Agnes, and took a pleasure in obeying her behests—and these always were guided by a love of order and a true taste. As you may tell the nest by the bird, so may you know the bird by its nest; and where there is afforded anything like free scope to the dweller, a dwelling-place becomes a true test of character. A large portion of Agnes Bendoran's home-life was spent in this little room, and the fact of it being far removed from the ordinary sitting-rooms of the family, secured to her an occasional seclusion that was very precious to her.

Among the strong silent influences of social life, perhaps there is hardly one more powerful with young people than the having, or not having, a sanctum of retreat. The want, when it exists, presses far less heavily upon young men than it does upon young women. Boys and youths can, at any rate, walk about unattended, and if in the family circle they sit for ten minutes with hands unemployed,

they are not necessarily rebuked for laziness. With young girls, even among the upper grades of the middle classes, it is far different. More often than not, sisters of different tastes and ideas occupy the same chamber, and even in commodious houses, where a spare room might easily be appropriated for retreat, the thing is never thought of; or, if suggested, that *bête noir* of English housewives, "an extra fire," stands for a lion in the way. And be it remembered, that the seven or eight months of our northern winter form just the period of the year when in-door seclusion is most needed.

With this herding together from morning till night, and from night till morning, only strong, self-willed, somewhat tyrannical natures can really preserve their individuality. Rare, delicate souls, whose tendency is to develope from the inner life to the outer, are cruelly crushed under such circumstances; they are like tender plants the growth of which is obstructed by the dead weight of a stone or a tile, plants which have to creep towards the sunlight with blanched leaves and attenuated stem, and which at best show themselves but as a weak, faded, distorted reflection of the "what might have been!"

If Agnes Bendoran had been the darling and inseperable companion of her worldly-minded mother, she could not by human possibility have been the Agnes Bendoran, of nearly eighteen, such as we now find her. In reality, the value of a little neglect is not half appreciated; and Agnes herself did not perhaps know how much she was indebted to it. And yet she did prize her privilege of retreating to her solitude almost whenever she would. Instinctively she felt the strength that was gained by bringing forth out of the darkness the deep things of the soul, and not fearing to look upon them in all the cross-lights of the mind, or through the coloured glass which the heart is always ready to lend. One result of her habits of meditation and self-examination was that she could look fearlessly at a truth, in whatever guise it presented itself. So that it was a truth, so that its credentials on that point bore every test she could apply to them, it was welcomed and nourished, even though it came to tear away pretty masks and pull down airy castles. If a duty at any time seemed not quite clear, Agnes, so to speak, could take it in her hand and look at it all round, could measure its

force, or find the weakening flaw; she could hold the delicate balance between "yes" and "no," and let the finger of conscience steadily advance and drop its grains of gold into the right scale. This done, the beam turned, the decision was final, and her mind freed from its heaviest burthen.

But can such habits as these be engendered in a family drawing-room, where, too often, the chatter of small talk is perpetually whipping up to showy froth all the littleness, and meanness, and indecision of human nature? Where, if a young girl sits musing, with finger between the leaves of a book, or her needle-work dropped into her lap, she is called a drone, and the Thought that in reality was afar off seeking treasure, is quickly recalled with mission unfulfilled. And thus in time the wings of the spirit, forbidden their free exercise, assume an earthward droop, and no longer seek to soar. Even prayer is hindered when people have not privacy.

It was a bright June day, and Agnes sat letter-writing in her little chamber. Outside the window a balcony had been fixed, and this was filled with flowering-plants, many of them choice specimens reared from slips given

to her at Sutton Court. The plants cast into the room a pleasant shade, which flickered through the open window across the floor, climbing even to the little white bed; while the scent of rose, and heliotrope, and mignonette entered by fitful breathings, as if to follow the flickering shadows. Above the mantel-piece her father's sword was suspended, and several water-colour paintings decorated the homely walls. These showed change and progress in the artist's touch, and only one of them had Agnes considered worthy of a glass and frame; in truth, the others retained their places for awhile rather from affectionate association connected with them in the mind of the girl-painter, than from self-satisfaction with her work.

One other accessory must be named, and that was a living one. A large sleek cat of the tabby order, with alternate zebra streaks of dark and Chinchilla-like fur, sat dozing and blinking on the table beside Agnes, and within reach of her caressing hand. Do not laugh at Agnes's pet; it is doubtful if she would have been permitted to keep a more troublesome one, and perhaps if cats were less common—if they were costly to procure, and difficult to

rear, their exceeding gracefulness would be really appreciated instead of being only coldly acknowledged, and they would be the frequent denizens of an artist's studio. Jessy was of mature years, but her cat-cares had been few, and consequently her youth had been prolonged. Always well-fed, the savage, hunter instincts of her race had been restrained, not developed; and when courting or accepting attention from her friends, the modulation of her purr, and the slight and gracious wave of her finely pointed-tail, were assurances of her gentleness. Of course the frolic habits of kittenhood were long since past; but Jessy could achieve successfully what human matrons find it well nigh impossible to do. She could on occasion perpetrate youthful tricks and antics without making herself absurd, and was by no means proof against the temptings of a tassel, or the witchery of a moving pen.

There was a tap at the door, and Agnes, without turning round, exclaimed, "Come in."

She thought it was a housemaid, and waited to complete the sentence she was writing. But in a few seconds she found a pair of arms round her neck, and in the next instant

Philippa Sutton's lips were pressed to her cheek.

"Dear Phil," exclaimed Agnes, starting up and returning her friend's caresses with interest—"dear Phil, I was in the act of writing to you, but it is an unexpected joy to see you. When did you come back to town, and who is with you down stairs?"

"Nobody. Finding Mrs. Blake was at your new house, Mamma drove on, hoping to meet her, as she wants to speak to her, but consented to leave me here the while. Jackson was horrified at my coming up the carpetless stairs, and the maid who was to show me the way, did not come at his call, so I rushed past everything, and will talk to you when I recover my breath."

If Philippa's lungs had not been in excellent order, she could hardly have delivered herself of such a speech after such a run. Presently she continued, "We are in town again for another month; so, after all, we hope to be at your ball in the new house."

"I am so glad," exclaimed Agnes, with evident delight, "now I shall take a real interest in it."

"We shall be such a party," continued

Philippa, "for my brothers will be in town, and my mother is going to ask Mrs. Blake to send a card to a friend of theirs,—I should say of Edgar's more particularly, for it is Edgar and Mr. Rivingstone who are so inseparable."

"I am certain any friend of your family will be highly welcome," replied Agnes.

"I am sure Edgar thought so," said Philippa, "or he would not have teased Mamma into obliging him. I wish the evening were come—the 20th July, is it not?—because after then you will be spared to me at Sutton. Now, child, what shall we wear? You have better taste than I, or all the milliners put together."

"Oh, Philippa, why do you say so?"

"Because I mean it. The most I can hope, by my unassisted self, to arrive at, is appearing 'stylish' or 'fashionable'—whereas you, without ever being dowdy or unfashionable, always contrive to add some trifle that makes you like a picture; or perhaps you omit some customary decoration that only fashion has induced us to tolerate, and the result is the same."

"But I hope I am not singular in my dress," replied Agnes in a tone of alarm.

"Only singularly tasteful and elegant," said Philippa—"there is the charm. Most people never notice what you wear, only those like me, who are fond of discovering a 'because' for every 'why,' do sometimes find out secrets of art from the effects of a ribbon or the looping up of a sleeve. Now tell me what you are going to wear yourself on the 20th. I insist on knowing," she added with mock authority.

"White lace, looped with violets and snow-drops. The amethyst arrow you gave me, for brooch to fasten a bouquet of snow-drops and green leaves; and a wreath of violets and snow-drops—that is all," said Agnes laughing.

"Very good; you wished to wear the shabby little brooch, and have chosen violets to match it—I see that."

"Shabby little brooch!—how can you call it so?"

"Because it is—rather. Well, I should not wish you to like my gift better than you like me. Now, Agnes, don't look as if you were going to cry, but please to tell me what I shall order, there's a darling—for I mean to have a new dress for the occasion."

Agnes was silent for a minute or so, and

then she said, "I should like to dress you in white also, but not in tulle or lace. Something richer would suit you better—white and silver tissue for instance, or brocaded silk, with a single red rose in your hair. Young as you are, you might wear diamonds if you had them."

"Which I have not," said Philippa, laughing.

"What I mean," resumed Agnes, "what I mean is that you are one of the few women who in youth can dress gorgeously without offending good taste. You have some opals and rubies, I know—wear them. And, Phil, if ever you go to a fancy ball, be sure to choose an Oriental costume."

"Agnes, you are a true artist," said Philippa, after a pause.

"Only on a very small scale," replied Agnes.

"I declare," said Philippa, "I almost wish I were a fairy and your godmother—bound, as fairy godmothers always are, to play strange tricks."

"What would you do for me?" asked Agnes, smiling.

"Flourish my wand and reduce you to poverty."

"But I am quite poor already," replied

Agnes, though making the confession in a mirthful manner. "If Mr. Blake had not married Mamma, I daresay I should have been a governess working for my living by this time."

"Dear Agnes," returned Philippa, in a caressing tone, and repenting her of her giddy words, "what I should wish the fairy wand to do, would be to take away everything from you that could divide you from Art. I don't know, but I almost think I could take myself away from you for a time, if it were to do you good, and give you leisure for painting."

"Darling, you always do me good by your praise and sympathy," said Agnes with emotion.

"Is it so, Aggy?—I am so glad. I know you will be appreciated by other people some day—your pictures I mean—for everybody loves you yourself already."

"I know very well," returned Agnes, evading further praise, "that next year, when Mamma will expect me to go out everywhere with her, I shall have little or no time for study, so, dear Phil, I quite understood what you mean by your first fairy wish."

"Is not your Mamma proud of your drawings?" asked Philippa.

"She likes to see them sometimes," returned Agnes, "but she does not care for Art as I do. I often wish she understood painting as well as she understands music, then she would know what nonsense Dr. Bryant talks when he says artists should be self-taught."

"Yet you have had very little instruction."

"That is my trouble. To be sure, I know how expensive good masters are—and perhaps, instead of repining, I ought to be thankful for the little instruction I have received. But I read a good deal on the subject of Art, and that helps me to see what is right and what is wrong,—what is high and what is low."

"You know the difference, that is certain," exclaimed Philippa, "however you came by your knowledge. Now, please to show me what you have been doing lately."

"I hardly dare."

"That hesitation only piques my curiosity," continued Philippa, "you must show me."

"Turn round," said Agnes gently, and bending her own eyes to the ground.

Philippa, quick in all her movements, obeyed almost as the words were spoken, and the next instant a shrill cry of delight escaped her lips. Her eye had caught the one little

painting that was protected by a glass, and decorated with a frame. It was a spirited likeness of Mrs. Sutton standing at the open window of her own morning-room, in just the attitude with which her children were so familiar. On a hundred summer days their merry voices on the lawn had called her forth in precisely the manner represented; so that the likeness was not only admirable in itself, but full of happy associations.

"Oh, Agnes," exclaimed Philippa, her voice husky with emotion, and grasping her friend's hand as she spoke, "when did you do this, for none of us to suspect what you were about?"

"I hardly know," returned Agnes, with a happy smile, for she saw that her work was giving intense pleasure; "one day last summer I was sitting under the great cedar-tree while you were gathering some roses, and your mamma leaned forward to look at you, in just that attitude, her hand raised to shade her eyes from the sun. I had a letter in my pocket, and a pencil by my side; and I sketched in the figure on the back of the letter. That was my rough outline, which I worked up afterwards, dear Mrs. Sutton giving me many an unconscious sitting."

"And you have succeeded where Royal Academicians have failed."

"Ah, they did not know that face as I do."

"Agnes, I must turn beggar, and entreat you to make a copy for me."

"And I must refuse," replied Agnes, with more archness than was common to her. "But, Phil," she continued, "read what I was writing, and you will see the portrait was intended for you; I mean to finish another for myself—I have the face already done."

The gift was accepted amid tears, and smiles, and kisses, and when, in another half-hour, Philippa was summoned to join Mrs. Sutton, and descended the carpetless stairs with a brown-paper parcel in her hand, her "acquisitiveness" was so thoroughly satisfied that I think the lucky finder of some monster nugget might still have had cause to envy the loving daughter's satisfaction at her new possession.

As for Agnes Bendoran, perhaps at no previous moment of her young life had she felt so happy. Happy in the glow of pure, warm friendship; happy in daring to listen to the clear low voice that of latter times had often whispered to her, "Thou, too, art a

painter." For much as it is the fashion to despise portrait-painting, and call it a low branch of art, a truly fine likeness is in reality a noble work. Let the mere caricaturist who, by a few coarse lines of exaggerated truth, recals to mind an absent image—be scorned if you will—he is not of kith or kin to the true artist, who, working from his own soul, recognises the soul-lineaments of his sitter, and so, transferring them to his canvas, makes his work immortal. Who that has gazed on the many nameless "portraits" by Titian, and Rubens, and Rembrandt, which gem the richest picture-galleries in the world, has not felt there to be entangled with them a breath of the spirit that renders them, like the human face or form itself, well nigh inexhaustible in their teachings to all who have eyes trained to see, and hearts accustomed to feel!

CHAPTER XV.

LEAVING THE OLD HOUSE.

"Believe thy mission, not alone with good,
The measure of thy days of life to fill."
W. C. BENNETT.

AT length the time so eagerly longed for has arrived. It is a week still to the 20th, and the new house is ready for occupation. Some days' employment for many hands—the tasteful mistress superintending—there still may be remaining; for pictures have yet to be finally arranged, and the Sèvres and Dresden china is still unpacked, and the lace curtains for the drawing-room are still unhung, a large looking-glass is still absent, and chandeliers have yet to be suspended, and certain carpets to be laid down. But so far as things essential and substantial are concerned,

the mansion is pronounced thoroughly habitable. True, certain lintels are left doorless, but only in preparation for the grand gala, when doors, had they been there, must have been lifted from their hinges; and other slight tokens of the coming event are sufficiently observable to the initiated. Tokens that deprive the stately dwelling of the home aspect which might otherwise have blended with its splendour.

Agnes will never pass another night in the little attic endeared to her by so many associations; and the consciousness of the stern "no more" had pressed at her heart and rendered her restless and wakeful during the last hours of darkness. Not till the early daylight of that summer morning had crept into her chamber did she fall asleep, and then her slumber was light and uneasy, and broken by confused and depressing dreams. As is usual in such cases, she awoke more exhausted than refreshed by her troubled slumber, and it was a minute or two before she could recal her faculties, so as to remember what the day was to bring forth, and to separate dry facts from the airy visions which seemed still to have hold on her brain. Not that she remembered

her dreams distinctly, though she knew they were dreams of long-past events—of her mother's widowhood, of the sorrows of her own childhood, and of the coming to dwell in Curzon Street in the then new house which was thought so charming by Mrs. Blake, and which now, as the old home, was so much despised. All day long, snatches of her dreams came fitfully to Agnes Bendoran's memory, and seemed to twine themselves with the realities around her.

Mrs. Blake was ready for her final departure —the carriage at the door. The little Blakes, with their governess and nurse, were already gone, and the mistress only waited for her elder daughter. Julie, the kind and clever Julie—nearly ten years older than when we last noticed her, but still the active, sprightly Frenchwoman—was sent to seek Agnes, and to say that her mother was ready to depart. Alas! Agnes was sitting in her little chamber among corded boxes, and piled-up furniture, weeping bitterly; it took some minutes of persistent self-control to render her sufficiently calm to obey the summons, and then, missing her pet, the companion of so many lonely hours, she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh! where

is Jessy? she was here a few minutes ago, but the noise of people on the stairs has disturbed her; I think you or I must carry her away, or she will be frightened at leaving her old home."

Julie goodnaturedly searched for the cat, which was soon forthcoming; for Jessy, a "thing of beauty" to the artist, and endeared to her mistress as being her solitary pet, vindicated in her tabbyship the feline character, and with dog-like affection proved not to have strayed very far. But one delay added to another had consumed some amount of time, and in their hearts both Agnes and Julie apprehended tart reproaches from the august lady who was kept waiting. But as it happened, their fears were not justified.

Mrs. Blake was not quite incapable of tender emotions, although for many years past she had done her best—or her worst—to benumb her heart. Sitting alone in her devasted drawing-room, waiting for her eldest child, a vague fear of the Future gathered like a cloud about her, while old memories seized the favourable moment and began to whisper of the strangely-chequered Past.

The nursery piano was coming down the

stairs—a well-worn instrument, on which the widowed music-teacher had given many a lesson—and as through the open door she saw the unwieldy thing, a crowd of recollections oppressed her mind, and she felt a choking sensation in her throat that could only be relieved by tears. The "long ago" and the "never more" were knocking at her heart—and the heart seemed huskily to reply—"I am not so good—I am not so grateful as I ought to be. Poor old house! why have I said such scornful things about you?"

Agnes's light foot-fall was heard at last, and entering the room with a quick step, the daughter said apologetically:—

"I am sorry, mamma, to have kept you waiting."

For a minute there was neither reply nor gesture of any kind; but Agnes could perceive that her mother's eyes were suffused with tears. Instinctively the daughter passed her arm round her mother's shoulders, as with detail she renewed her excuses.

"Never mind, my dear," said Mrs. Blake in a gentle tone—"indeed, I am glad you were not ready. I think it has done me good to have time to say 'good-bye' to the old walls."

Strange the spell of those simple words and that tearful voice! Agnes felt her heart leap towards her mother with a strength of love and sympathy which she had not experienced for many years. She was permitted to kiss the moistened cheek, and though her own weeping was renewed, the dull sadness which had oppressed her seemed lifted and lightened. It was so sweet to sympathise with her mother—and so dear a privilege to have her sympathy accepted.

Meanwhile Julie was waiting in the hall, tranquillising the uneasy Jessy, and Jackson with a pale face was standing near the door. As Mrs. Blake passed between her servants and was helped into her carriage, they both felt, rather than saw, that she was not so indifferent or insensible as they had supposed. The thought that they had done her injustice, made them commence a white-scored account in her favour—perhaps to run on with interest.

The mother and daughter said little, but sat hand in hand, as the well-hung brougham rolled rapidly along Piccadilly and down Grosvenor Place towards the new locality; and Julie, their vis-à-vis, with tact and good taste,

busied herself excessively in the care of Jessy.

And the Lares and Penates—how journeyed they? And was it their mystic shriek and wail at being removed, that awoke such strange echoes in poor human hearts?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN THE NEW HOUSE.

"The Sundays of man's life,
Threaded together on time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the Wife
Of the eternal glorious King:
On Sundays, Heaven's door stands ope;
Blessings are plentiful and ripe,
More plentiful than hope."

GEORGE HERBERT.

STRANGE to say, Mr. Blake's personal removal to the new house took place very much as if he were an automaton. Leaving the needful arrangements to his wife's discretion, he had for some time past seemed singularly cold and indifferent to all that was going on. Moreover, servants and others had begun to notice a certain absence of mind and want of punctuality on his part which were quite new

features in his character. Jackson was seriously uneasy about his master, though he said little on the subject, and allowed his companions the full fling of their conjectures as to the causes of the change; causes variously summed up under the heads of "master not being so young as he was—time for such a rich man to give up business—the house so uncomfortable like, these two months past—no rest night or day."

It was Sunday morning—the first Sabbath in the new house—and Agnes Bendoran presided at the breakfast table. It was the usual custom on this day for the younger members of the family to breakfast with their parents; and the little Harry and Clarissa, with Miss Mansfield, their governess, were already seated at the table.

"I wonder why papa doesn't come to breakfast?" exclaimed the little girl, who was her father's darling. "I shall give him such a scolding; I never saw him all yesterday. Sister," thus the children always called Agnes, "Sister, why might we not come down to dessert yesterday?"

"Because, dear," replied Agnes, "dinner was so very late, it was time for you to be in

bed before papa came home. And poor papa had a bad headache, which, perhaps, is the reason that he is late this morning. But we hungry people need not wait."

"I think you said the parish church was not far off," interposed the governess, interrogatively.

"Only about three minutes' drive—or five minutes' walk," returned Agnes, "we have ample time before us" And thus consoled, Miss Mansfield proceeded to take her breakfast in leisurely comfort.

Presently Mr. Blake entered the room, and the usual morning salutations ensued. I do not think in word or gesture they varied from his ordinary manner, but he confessed that the headache had not departed; and at least Agnes and the little Clarry felt there was a shadow reflected from suffering in his whole appearance.

Julie entered with a silver waiter, napkin covered; this was a token that Mrs. Blake would breakfast in her dressing-room, an occurrence so frequent that it attracted no particular attention. But as Agnes was carefully arranging some delicacy she thought her mother would like—Mr. Blake observed—

"I am afraid your mamma will not be able to attend church this morning, but she wishes to see you, Agnes, before you go. She is not well—I think headaches must be catching."

Perhaps it was the strong Art-element in Agnes Bendoran's nature that enabled her mind to receive almost at a glance the details as well as the broad lines which make up the *tableaux vivants* of real life. Certainly, she never forgot the "picture" that her mother unconsciously made that Sunday morning, or the ache at her own heart which it occasioned.

In a dressing-room, sumptuously appointed with all the luxuries of looking glass, and silk damask, lace draperies, and elaborate gilding, sat Mrs. Blake. It was a warm, bright summer day, but the room had a western aspect, so at present it lay in shade, and was cool and pleasant, and redolent also of a certain delicate perfume which Mrs. Blake habitually used.

She was attired in a white *robe de chambre*, her fine dark hair streaming over her shoulders, and only temporarily released from Julie's cares when Agnes entered the room. Mrs. Blake leaned her arm on a little marble table, on which the substantial portions of her breakfast still remained untouched.

"Sit down, Agnes," she said as Julie left the room, "I want you to give a message to Jackson. I am miserably ill this morning—it is out of the question my going to church, though I wished very much to make my appearance there;" and as she spoke she glanced across the room to the cheval glass, on a bracket of which hung a feathery fabric of lilac and white, which had been pronounced an enchanting bonnet.

"Indeed, dear mamma, you look very pale and ill; let me stay at home and nurse you."

"Not on any account. I particularly beg that all the rest of the family may be there. Your papa wished very much to stay at home, but I persuaded him to make an effort to go. The servants, too, I have directed all that can be spared, to attend. Not Jackson though, he must stay at home this morning. I want you to say to him that we are not at home to-day to any one whomsoever, except Mr. Pennington—he will remember Mr. Pennington, though we have seen so little of him of late years."

"Oh, yes, I am sure he will."

"And, moreover, Agnes," continued Mrs. Blake, "moreover, I want Jackson to under-

stand that he is not to make my being ill this morning—or my being denied to people—of any consequence to the household—servants are so tiresome, and they do talk so stupidly. It is true Sunday is a day on which I generally receive—but of course we are in confusion still—people must know that, though I foolishly sent out some cards yesterday,—and besides, I am knocked up with all these worries and fatigues, and there is so much to think of still for the 20th, and only two days to do it in. I wish I had never thought of the ball; I declare I am feeling disgusted with this house already. Julie thinks the paint on the balcony still smells, and that that is what has made your papa and me both ill."

Every sentence of this lengthy speech seemed to have been jerked out in a mechanical manner, and each phrase seemed burthened with a heavier meaning than its simple words conveyed. Agnes felt miserably depressed, and once more pleaded to remain at home with her mother.

"I tell you no," returned Mrs. Blake, "a score of people will be looking out for us—my absence will not be much remarked if the rest of the family attend; above all things, I wish

matters to proceed as usual—as usual, wherever it is possible. Only I cannot see people to-day —no one is to be admitted except Mr. Pennington—you understand."

The message that was intended to suggest, rather than to convey instructions, grew clarified by passing through the daughter's truthful mind; but the old servant understood his part none the worse, because his cue was distinctly given.

And now the carriage was at the door, and Miss Mansfield, with the two children, who were dressed in the height of juvenile fashion, lingered about the staircase and hall, waiting for the family party to be completed. Just as Agnes approached, Mr. Blake made his appearance, hat in hand; but as his glance took in the gay equipage at the door, and the group of servants in attendance, a shadow passed over his face like that occasioned by a sharp spasm of pain. Perhaps, Agnes alone saw the look; but she even fancied the muscles of the mouth quivered for a moment, and contracted.

"I will walk," exclaimed Mr. Blake, "I prefer walking."

"Then let me walk with you, papa," said Agnes, with assumed gaiety; "indeed, walking will be delightful this lovely morning."

And without waiting for an answer, she passed her arm through his, as soon as they reached the pavement. She fancied that her wrist was just perceptibly pressed—in token that her proposal had given pleasure. Meanwhile little Clarry looked back from the carriage window, with a pout on her lips, wondering why papa deserted her on a Sunday morning.

St. ——'s was a fashionable church, with a fashionable congregation, and a fashionable preacher. When one has to marry together such nouns with such an adjective, what results can be expected? Surely nothing but a Temple changed to a Vanity Fair, and a lethargy of souls beneath the ice-glitter of cold intellectualism. Nobody expected to be made uncomfortable at St. ——'s church, by the saying of unpleasant things; at the same time the service was so briskly conducted, that it was seldom any one dozed over it. The rector's polished sermons were never tiresome, and were often even interesting from the anecdotes he sprinkled over them, and the epigrammatic style he adopted. His favourite plan was that of painting virtue as infinitely beautiful, charming, and one might say seductive; and depicting vice as a thing so hideous,

that it was wonderful how anybody could choose to be wicked. The worst of this style was that his hearers did not recognise the likeness to the spiritual in-dwellers of their own hearts.

But it so happened that the rector could not preach this morning. He had been seized with sudden illness; one of his two curates was out of town; several of his most choice clerical friends had special engagements; and in an eleventh-hour extremity he was glad to accept the services of a friend's friend, the poor curate belonging to a London church in a "low" neighbourhood. Alas! the poor curate had no time to prepare a dainty discourse for the ears polite that were now to listen; so he selected a sermon he had preached some weeks before—one of several discourses which he had reason to believe had touched the hearts of the lowly and unlettered. Perhaps, even, he was secretly glad that he had not time to be tempted to soften, refine, and attenuate that which had been written in the fiery fervour of strong conviction, and deep emotion.

The text was proclaimed.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness."

There was something in the clear, sonorous

tones of the Strange Preacher that startled even the most listless into attention; and in many places a slight rustle of silk was audible, —as the fair wearers of it settled themselves to listen, lounging comfortably. As the Preacher proceeds he warms with his subject; not that he even approaches the boundary line which separates steady sustained power from rickety rant; no fear is there that a metaphor will break loose from his reining hand, or that any "vaulting" figure of speech will "o'erleap itself," and fall with its dead weight on the wrong side of the argument. In five minutes he has the command of the congregation; he is the teacher as well as the preacher; he is the soul-surgeon probing and cauterising seared consciences. He does not depict "envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness" of mien so hideous that we bar the human heart against their entrance; on the contrary, he shows their syren-like deceptions, their witch-like fascinations, their aggressive impetus when unresisted, so that listeners begin to recognise the gnome-dwellers in their own hearts.

And the Preacher calls "fashionable follies" by their Bible names, and thereby shocks and

distresses some of his hearers; and he does not pretend to consider the Christian life a life easy to lead, or in the least degree attractive to them who have signed themselves bond-servants to the "world, the flesh, and the Devil;"—those cheating masters, who never pay wages in the coin they have promised. And as the arrowy words of truth strike home to many a heart, the fashionable congregation is visibly affected. Veils are dropped over many fair faces, and handkerchiefs raised to many bright eyes. Even men dash the drops that have gathered from their lashes, as if old and young were ashamed of playing penitent. And meanwhile there is such hushed attention to the one voice, that a low sob or gasp of emotion in a neighbour is distinctly audible.

In the freshly-cushioned pew which belonged of right to the new house, Agnes sat near her step-father, and could not but be conscious that tears were raining down his cheeks. Her own soul was touched by the preacher's glowing words, but was strung thereby to spiritual exaltation and serene joy, rather than to any wail of sorrow or tearful emotion. Indeed, the secret spell of that preacher's winged words lay in the fact that

they bore a separate message to every separate heart; for truth is like a prism, and presents different aspects, according as it is seen from different angles. There were at least twenty of his hearers that day—twenty persons of different ages and conditions—who felt in their hearts that the stranger's sermon was sent expressly for themselves—and these thanked God for his special providence; and there were perhaps a dozen other hearers who tremblingly suspected that it was *meant* for them, and who in their frightened egotism wondered how the preacher could have had knowledge of their lives—not perceiving that man's individual experience is always shaped by God's universal law.

But as a skilful musician returns after all his wanderings to the key-note from which he started, so the strange preacher came back to his text at last, showing how the "kingdom of God" does in reality exist even here below, making for them who unfeignedly "seek" it, a heaven even on earth. And when at last the benediction was pronounced, and the final Amen said, the fashionable congregation seemed awakened from a trance, the memory of which, however, could never be wholly banished.

Few souls were there which did not retain some aroma of the atmosphere into which they had been lifted; few which had not imbibed some good seed which should grow, or be choked, according to the ground on which it had fallen.

When they reached the broad daylight of the street, it gladdened Agnes to see how much better Mr. Blake was looking. The dark shadow of suffering seemed fainter on his face, and what remained of it seemed to come and go fitfully, instead of being fixed immovably. And this tender gladness coming upon her recent soul-exaltation, helped to make herself look radiant, happy, and beautiful. There were greetings from many of their acquaintances as they left the church, and all remarked or thought how wondrously well she was looking. "Handsomer than her mother, I declare!" exclaimed one young man—and he might have dwelt further on her attractions, but for the prevailing buzz of exclamations and inquiries about the strange preacher. "Who is he?—What is he?—Did you ever hear such a sermon?" were phrases oftener heard in the doorway that morning, than the more usual comments of a fashionable congregation.

Mr. Pennington was a kind friend as well as a clever lawyer; and though he had some slights on the part of Mrs. Blake to forgive; and though he disliked drawing the dark tangle of business through the bright woof of the Sunday, he had not felt able to resist Mr. Blake's note of entreaty to come to him that day. He arrived soon after Mr. Blake himself reached home, and they remained closeted together for nearly two hours, at the expiration of which time Mr. Pennington looked extremely grave, and Mr. Blake a little less anxious than at the beginning of the interview. The fact was, the affairs they had been discussing were of much darker aspect than the lawyer had expected, while at the same time he had been able to open up loopholes for light which had previously escaped the notice of his client.

"Will you not see Clara?—will you not go into the drawing-room?" exclaimed Mr. Blake, as his friend and adviser was about to depart.

"Certainly, if you wish it—for it is a long time since I had the pleasure of speaking to Mrs. Blake;" and as he ascended the staircase, Mr. Pennington could not but observe the

preparations for the coming *fête*;—the skeleton wires on which were to hang festoons of flowers, temporary brackets for lights, &c., &c.

"To add to our tribulation," whispered Mr. Blake, "my wife has sent out cards to four hundred people for Tuesday next. Poor Clara! I am afraid it is harder for her than for me just now; I think I ought not to have told her while hope remained."

"Nay, nay, you did right to tell her the whole truth."

"I drew it from him," said Clara, who from the doorless drawing-room had overheard the last few words; "but, oh, come into the little back-room where we can be private, and which will not remind me of the dreadful party."

Mr. Pennington had said truly; it was long since he had spoken to Mrs. Blake, though he had seen her at a distance within the last few months. Once at the Opera—he being in the pit—and another time when she was driving in the park,—and on such occasions she had looked radiant. But to-day she was pale and wan, and she wore the most ordinary morning dress she possessed.

"It is very good of you," returned the lady as soon as they were seated, "it is very

good of you to come to us so promptly. Oh, Mr. Pennington, there is no one my husband relies on so much as he does on you, and if you are able to cheer him with hope, I shall begin to hope too."

"My dear lady," replied Mr. Pennington, "I will not deceive him with false hopes; but in all sincerity there does seem one plank to which he may cling."

"You mean the Liverpool people?" said Clara.

"I do."

"If you knew the obligations they are under to Mr. Blake," exclaimed the wife, wringing her hands as she spoke.

"Unfortunately gratitude has nothing to do with the question. In business relations, people need be well satisfied who meet with bare justice. But be assured, all that can be done shall be done. There are trials coming on to-morrow, at which I must be present; but I will induce my partner—my son-in-law, Mr. Martyn—to go down himself by the morning train. He may do more personally than writing can."

"Ah, Lucy's husband!—How good—how kind you are! And how is dear Mrs. Pen-

nington—and the sweet girls—both married, and mothers, I know?"

"All well—and grandmamma bearing her honours bravely. Lucy has three little ones, and Mrs. Gordon four."

It was lucky Mr. Pennington had mentioned names; for though Mrs. Blake had duly received their wedding cards, the young lawyer and the young surgeon were so completely out of her set, that she had forgotten all about them. Nevertheless, she continued, and not without sincerity, "If this storm should blow over, surely your daughters and Mrs. Pennington will come and see me,—I know I have neglected them shamefully—but old friends—oh! Mr. Pennington, when we are in trouble we feel there are no friends in the world like old friends—" and stretching out her hands as she spoke, the miserable Clara burst into tears.

Poor Mr. Blake took one of the appealing hands and raised it to his lips—in lover-like fashion. Strange was it, yet true, that in this sad hour, when Ruin stood near with dart already poised, he loved his wife with deeper and less selfish tenderness than he had really felt when he adored her in all the youthful

pride of her beauty and gay fascinations. In fact, he was suffering now for her, more than for himself; and if he remembered her faults, he thought his own weakness had fostered them.

Mr. Pennington pressed the other hand with a fatherly gesture, as he exclaimed—

"Whether the storm blow over or not, be sure we are always your friends. But, dear lady, let us hope for the best. And though it may cost you a great effort, you must try not to arouse suspicion."

"Then I must not put off this horrible party!" said Clara in a despairing tone, and she continued: "I am really ill—that would be no vain excuse—I have the list of invited guests—it might be done—and an advertisement in the paper—"

Mr. Blake and Mr. Pennington shook their heads mournfully—and the former said in a husky voice, "The stake is immense; try, for my sake—for the children's sake to crush suspicion, if it should have raised its head. To do this, my Clara, you must be gay and cheerful. Ah, I should have kept my secret a little longer."

"You could not do so," returned the wife;

"though I did not know the nature of your trouble, the shadow of it has lain upon my heart for many days past. It has made me weak and nervous, and has seemed to wrap this house in a sort of horror. I was right to question you as I did last night."

"My poor Clara!" said her husband.

"There;—I am better now. If it is my part to keep up appearances, I will try what can be done. Agnes and the children will be home from afternoon service shortly, and you shall see how well I will behave."

And she kept her word bravely. Agnes rejoiced to believe that her mother's ailment of the morning had been but slight and temporary.

Mr. Pennington had a Sunday family dinner-party that day at Bayswater, at which even the two elder pinafored grand-children were permitted to assist. But after dinner young Gordon was speedily dismissed to join the ladies; while the two lawyers sat much longer than usual over their wine. When at last Mr. Pennington and Mr. Martyn entered the drawing-room, they encountered some sort of reprimand from their wives for talking business on such a day. But Mr. Pennington

observed rather gravely, that there was a certain parable about an ass or an ox falling into a pit that was possibly applicable to the present occasion.—And Mr. Martyn startled Lucy by exclaiming—

"Do not let us be late, my love, for I must be up early, to be off by the morning mail train to Liverpool."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BALL. A BANQUO AT THE BANQUET.

"And all is mockery, and a maddening show!"
ROBERT BROWNING.

IT is night. The thousand throbbing stars of heaven are looking down upon our modern Babel, and one could dream their sleepless eyes pulsate in strange unison with the beatings of poor human hearts. But who in London town on summer nights looks up responsively to the orbs which lavish their lustre on fair and foul, on rich and poor alike? Not the gay crowd whose vision is dazed by the glare of gas-lights, and who have not the trick of looking higher than to the jewels in a fair woman's hair.

Carriages are rattling through many a street and square, bearing burthens sometimes of

heavy hearts beneath the flutter of gay apparel; yet eager youth is of the throng also, bright and joyous with expectation of it knows not what, and ready to lavish its affluence of enjoyment on small and fleeting objects. Many carriages converge towards a certain street, not half-a-mile from the Royal Home, and in that street a certain house proclaims itself the point of attraction.

An awning of pink-drapery extends over the drawing-room balcony, and shines with rosy brightness from the strong lights within. A broad carpet covers the pavement before the doorway, and is fringed by a plebeian crowd, who take strange delight in a momentary glimpse of the fair forms which alight from the carriages, and trip up the broad steps to be quickly lost in the misty radiance of the gaily garlanded interior. Surely, envy is not a vice of the poor, or they would not thus love the cold reflected beams of pleasure they do not share!

Dancing was to be preceded by a selection of vocal and instrumental music, for which professional performers of high repute had been engaged. The knowledge of the "musical treat" in store occasioned guests to be

unusually punctual, so that almost on the stroke of ten o'clock they began to assemble. When people arrive at a party in a crowd and crush, instead of in single file, of course if Briareus himself were the host he could afford but a hurried greeting to each. Smiling gestures and brief phrases were all that Mrs. Blake could bestow on any of her friends and acquaintances when they marshalled past her, as she stood near the drawing-room doorway.

Let us, however, listen to their conversation, as by twos and threes they stood chatting, or found the most commodious seats in the music-room.

"What an Aladdin's Palace we are in!" exclaimed a lady of birth and breeding, whose position allowed her the privilege of admiring.

"The exquisite taste which prevails is the charm," replied another.

"I always fancy the genii of the lamp *had* good taste," returned the first speaker, "so I will indulge in my original illusion. Those draperies seem really arranged by some fairy, so free are they from the show of constrained adjustment."

"It is the perfection of art to conceal arti-

fice," replied the other, "or, as Festus more truely says:—

'Simplicity is nature's first step and the last of art.'"

"How perfectly the rooms are lighted," exclaimed another speaker; "all wax—ah! there is nothing like it."

"You are right," chimed in a shrewd old lady. "I know I am generally check-mated when I attempt to defend the old times, and, indeed, I admit they were not too 'good;' but I cling to the *bougies* nevertheless."

"You do, of course," returned the other; and he added, in a whisper, "I have always felt certain that if coal-gas had been known in Milton's days he would have preferred it to naphtha and asphaltus for the lighting up of his Pandemonium."

The old lady laughed and nodded her assent, though she hinted a fear that the pure wax of old times had lighted up as much wickedness as the nauseous gas had ever winked and blinked at.

"How well Mrs. Blake is looking to-night," said another; "I think that pink moire is particularly becoming to her."

"Yes, softened as it is by the point lace."

"But," whispered the other speaker, "do you see—I feel sure—she rouges. I never suspected her of such a habit before to-night. But I am certain of it; observe for yourself."

"Hush! Miss Bendoran is near."

"Ah, how elegant she is—so very graceful in all her movements."

"Do you know who that beautiful girl is to whom she is talking?"

"That is Miss Sutton—and those two young men are her brothers."

"Ah, indeed! and which is the mother?"

"That noble-looking woman who is shaking hands with Mrs. Blake, and introducing her young friend."

"Who is the stranger, do you know?" continued the dealer in interrogations.

"I believe I caught the name; it was Rivingstone, I think."

"Of Lord Rivingstone's family?"

"I don't know, but it is probable."

"I asked because I used to know a great deal about them; and there is a grandson, who is called the heir, who must be much about that young man's age."

"And is he not the heir?"

"Yes and no; he is the present Lord's direct descendant, but there is a mystery about the title, and it is believed the grandson will not succeed without having his right disputed. There was a great lawsuit many years ago—settled then in favour of the present Lord—but it is rumoured that the contending branch of the family has now fresh evidence to produce. Very sad, is it not, if the young man has been brought up with expectations that are not to be realised?"

"Very; but you know what is considered to be nine points of the law."

"Yes, and I suppose that is the reason that the adverse party will wait till the old Lord's death, as it will be easier to prevent the grandson assuming the title and taking possession of the estates than to dispossess the present owner."

"When a noble family is found in such a position, one feels there is no certainty in human affairs," said the former speaker, with a half-subdued sigh.

"You may well say so," returned the other; "think of the reverses there have been in the mercantile classes the last three months! Families reduced from affluence to beggary, and every great failure occasioning a host of

small ones. A money-panic spreads as fast as fever or small-pox, I think."

"Very true, but people shouldn't speculate."

The last speaker was a single lady, of a certain age, to whom a secured annuity of a thousand a-year had lately descended.

By this time the seats in the music-room were all occupied, and Mr. Blake, who had not finished his toilet when the earliest guests arrived, was now passing among them, making his salutations. Agnes was doing her part, as daughter of the house, quietly and gracefully, and already her card of the dances registered numerous engagements. First on her list of partners was Edgar Sutton, and the second was his friend Arthur Rivingstone.

An evening party is not the occasion on which to enjoy fine music. When we find ourselves at a public concert, among strangers all equally silent, the case is different. We have studied the programme on and off ever since it came to us with our purchased tickets, and we have made up our minds to the enjoyment, and feel we should be cheating ourselves if we did not listen. But when friends and acquaintances are gathered round

us, each with a word of some sort to say, or to hear; or with a morsel of news to give, or to receive; or with a question to discuss; in short, when the strange agglomeration of elements, which makes up what we call society, is taking place, the mind is not attuned to appreciate grand music; and the most that people can generally do is to be angry with themselves for not being more attentive and better pleased than they are. As well attempt to read fine poetry in a railway-carriage, instead of fugitive literature, as listen to Beethoven or Mendelsohn at a brilliant *soirée*. Before the human soul can rightly entertain the great things of Art, it must sweep clear and make fresh the guest-chamber to receive them.

Mr. and Mrs. Blake, however, were known to be enthusiasts about music, and they usually exerted a gentle but abiding influence to keep listeners quiet during its performance; but somehow, on this occasion they were less successful than of old. Perhaps the middle-aged guests were particularly eager to talk, and the young to dance; certain it is that the *prima donna* was incensed at the hum which was a running accompaniment to her "Non più Mesta," and after the concert she swept

past Mrs. Blake with an air of offended dignity, declining to remain longer, or even to take refreshments. Thus, there seemed a something going wrong from the beginning, although it is doubtful if the hostess so much as noticed Madame B——'s displeasure.

The dancing commenced, and rarely had Agnes Bendoran been more animated. She had become engaged for the first dance to Edgar Sutton, though it seemed an arrangement rather understood than expressed. And then he had so much to tell of Oxford life, that was all new and interesting to her! Scarcely less did she enjoy her second quadrille, for her conversation with young Rivingstone was chiefly about beautiful Sutton; and very especially did they talk of her dear friend Philippa. Although it would appear that at this time Arthur had only seen Philippa twice, it struck Agnes that he understood her better than anyone she had ever met out of the Sutton family—and better than her brother Godfrey by many degrees; for the nearest of kin are sometimes farthest removed from the pale of the elective sympathies. Agnes had never in her life enjoyed a gay assemblage so much as she was enjoying the present

party; and yet—and yet—whenever she looked at her mother, or Mr. Blake, she seemed to see, or to think a something, which told her she had no right to be so happy.

It was nearly midnight when Millie Farrell arrived at the ball. Since she had become a successful authoress, she had generally been invited to Mrs. Blake's most important parties, and, indeed, things had come to such a pass, that she had declined her aunt's invitations more than once. Sometimes she had been engaged elsewhere; sometimes she had been too busy with her pen to keep late hours, and therefore had begged to be excused.

Very different was the Millie Farrell of seven-and-twenty, from the Millie Farrell we first introduced to the reader. And yet, her common sense, which so rarely got twisted awry, still moulded her character. It kept her quite clear of conceit or presumption, at the same time that it enabled her to accept with composure a certain consideration which seemed now to be generally awarded her. Even in matters of the toilet, which, so soon as she began to "go into society," grew into a real trouble and difficulty, an inspiration of common sense helped her through.

One day she called upon a respectable milliner—not one of ultra-fashionable repute, the *employée* of duchesses, and accustomed to deal with the revenues of high life—but a personage of more moderate pretensions—and introducing herself to Mrs. ——, stated her case somewhat to the following effect:—

"I have sometimes occasion to visit in good society; but I am not rich, and my time is valuable to me, so that I cannot devote days and hours to planning and contriving my habiliments. I can only afford so-and-so for gowns and bonnets, and the et ceteras of showy attire. Will you take this sum, and supply me with what is sufficiently fashionable and proper? You see I am not handsome, and I believe I have not much taste. What I wish is, to dress like the generality of people I meet, so as never to look particular."

The milliner—a well-to-do, good-tempered little body—smiled, or, properly speaking, laughed, at Millie's queer proposal; but she also had common sense, and was struck with the idea. She began to wish that some of her fussy customers, who tried sorely that good temper—which, perhaps, after all, was less absolutely good than well-disciplined by

hard wear and tear—would adopt a similar plan, instead of insisting on atrocities being perpetrated which made her eyes blink, and her heart ache, and haggling about prices till the difference between them was taken out in mutual worry. Accordingly, the bargain was struck, and the two well-intentioned, common-sense people got on admirably. Mrs. —— studied Millie's "style," and, in reality, dressed her so judiciously, that by-and-bye Millie found herself looked up to by certain people of her "set" as a young lady of consummate taste; and, not to receive honours to which she was unentitled, she had to confess to some of her intimates the state of the case, and that she never "shopped"—an admission which, in a roundabout way, helped to reward Mrs. —— for her good faith.

Besides always looking "presentable," it had been discovered by degrees that the unaccomplished Millie could do one thing much better than the average of young ladies. She could talk sensibly, and consequently entertainingly, on a variety of subjects. Reverential women, deficient in self-esteem, and with their intellects cabined and confined by a dead weight of circumstances, thought it a privilege to enjoy

a *sotto voce* chat with the young authoress—thinking to themselves, with a sort of surprise, that she was just like other people, only more clever and unaffected; while shy men—for that rare genus is not quite extinct—or middle-aged men who had spent all their copper coin of small talk twenty years ago, often found themselves talking with her in a fluent and animated manner. Thus gradually had Millie changed her position as a visitor at her uncle's house. Instead of being the tolerated poor relation, she was now the very much respected and particularly welcome guest.

Mrs. Blake had turned more than one expectant look towards the staircase, wishing Millie would make her appearance. She wanted to introduce her to two or three people who had been inquiring about her; and also to a business friend of her husband's—a stranger guest, whose great black eyes seemed to meet the glance of the hostess whenever she looked in his direction. He seemed, to Mrs. Blake's excited fancy, somebody dreadfully clever—and, perhaps, Millie might turn the piercing eyes approvingly on herself.

At last the wished-for face was seen, and

Mrs. Blake pressed forward to meet her niece.

"My dear, how late you are!" she exclaimed, in a tone of reproachful welcome.

"It is not my fault," replied Millie. "I waited for Charley, who has only just come home from the city. I must say he was vexed with me for not coming an hour ago, and would not allow me to wait while he dressed. He will follow as soon as he can. And, dear aunt, my mother sent her kind regards, and begged you would excuse her: you know she is rather frightened of large parties, and I do not require a *chaperon* here."

I doubt if, at the moment, the hostess so much as remembered the existence of Mrs. Farrell, or heard any part of Millie's little speech, after the announcement that Charley had only just come home from the city.

Scores of the youthful guests have danced till they surely would have been weary, but for the stimulus of self-satisfaction and implied admiration; admiration dashed with a *soupçon* of something that often changes it into flirtation. When one has learnt something of the great realities of human life, and of the capabilities of the human heart, a ball-

room ceases to be altogether an enlivening scene. A "wall-flower," who, with a set smile on her face, sits playing with her feathered fan, may have sharp memories, and strange fancies flitting through her brain; fancies like that of pitying a poor half-open moss-rose that has fallen from a bouquet, but not till all the moss had been chafed away, and the outer leaves wantonly plucked off.

Scores of the elder guests have chatted away with seeming contentment: and Millie has not found the dark eyes particularly embarrassing or their owner wondrously sage; she being quite innocent of her aunt's opinion, and being left to form her own estimate of the individual. Millie perceives after a while that Charley has arrived, and notices even that he looks very handsome and distinguished. She sees that he is holding a brief conversation with his uncle, and that, at Mr. Blake's evident entreaty, he takes from his pocket a paper which he gives to him. Mrs. Blake also observes the pair, and feels strangely comforted. She knows very well that Charley has been detained in the city, that he might be the bearer of important tidings; and he

looks so perfectly himself that she thinks they cannot be evil.

The paper is a telegram consisting of one word; the word "Impossible."

Mr. Blake passes his cambric handkerchief across his brow—across his mouth, but by an effort of will he gains—if he had momentarily lost—the outward signs of composure.—And immediately it is supper-time—and there is a general move down-stairs to the dining-room.

Happily, at so large an assembly, when supper must be served to successive detachments—guests "stand not upon the order of going" with any strict punctilio. Happily —for this banquet was nearly as fearful to Mr. Blake as that which Banquo's shade made terrible to the Thane of Cawdor. Only instead of a spectral presence disturbing his vision, a spirit voice seemed shouting one word in his ear. And yet, mechanically, he had given his arm to a lady guest—and talked some common talk in no unusual tone.

But the voice cannot be silenced, and hark! a dozen foolish human tongues have caught up the word! That girl of nineteen—a coquette already—urged to dance one after-supper dance—laughs out "Impossible." Ano-

ther has not strength in her slight fingers to pull a cracker, and cries "Impossible." A broken bracelet—it is found "Impossible" to clasp. And, worse than all, Dr. Bryant and Mr. Fairley, amidst their customary contention, for once, with cruel mockery, agree that nothing is "Impossible."

Not only is the word shouted, but now Mr. Blake sees it written—written athwart the rich viands on the loaded tables—in the bubbles of the sparkling wine—on the gay apparel of smiling guests—and while attempting to raise a glass of champagne to his lips, Compton Blake falls back speechless. His disturbed countenance tells the truth at once. He is seized with Paralysis!

Agnes Bendoran happened to be near him at the time; and it was her arm that was first passed round his helpless form, and for a while supported his drooping head. In the horror of the moment she almost forgot the crowd of lookers-on as she knelt beside the heap of human infirmity. But in so large an assembly, one or more medical men were likely to be present—and, indeed, it proved that an eminent physician was in the supper-room; and another up stairs, chatting at that

moment with their hostess. Inexperienced as she was, Agnes nevertheless felt intuitively that a terrible calamity had happened, and an agonised pity for her mother overpowered her own natural distress. Yet even when the doctor had lifted Mr. Blake into an easy chair, she felt rooted to the spot, for she still clasped one hand of the sufferer—the hand that still retained its power, and its fingers had closed over hers. She looked round and saw that Edgar Sutton was at her side—his face the most distressed of all. "Edgar,—my mother!" the thought and the words came out with one flash, as speech does when the heart speaks. And Edgar flew to do her bidding, comprehending all it included; and pausing only to answer by a look, which had a gleam of pleasure in it amid all the woe.

But the terrible tidings had already transpired, although three minutes had not yet elapsed since Mr. Blake's seizure. The search for the second physician had been eager, and the wretched wife had heard the truth abruptly, and even with exaggeration, if exaggeration were possible.

When Edgar Sutton reached the drawing-room, he found a scene of confusion and

dismay, only less frightful than the one he had just quitted. Guests were asking for cold water, and using fans and essences in a half-frantic manner, and without much effect; for Mrs. Blake was stretched on a sofa in a dead faint, the rouge which indeed soiled her cheeks proclaiming itself after a very ghastly fashion.

"Lies, great and small, are all of one weight," said the man with the black eyes to a friend as they hurried down stairs; "lies are all of one weight, or I should call that sprinkling of pink powder a light affair in comparison with the great lies by which we are surrounded. Poor wretch! I caught her eye just as she went off. Waiter," he continued, turning to a supernumerary—"my cloak—I'm number 150."

Perhaps it is half from an involuntary respect for the sacredness of sorrow, and half from a natural shrinking from the exhibition of suffering, that people not nearly concerned with or allied to the sufferers hurry away as fast as possible from the scene of a catastrophe. And it is well that it should be so, for there is something in poor humanity that makes us in our hour of anguish shrink from a crowd

of our fellow-creatures; even if the crowd be made up of sympathisers, and the words of each—taken separately as a unit—might be soothing as balm to the wounded spirit. Much more certainly is this the case when the crowd is chiefly made up of mere acquaintances rather than friends.

There is no need to tell how quickly the greater part of Mrs. Blake's guests departed that terrible night, or how few tasted the sumptuous supper provided. Certainly the most thoughtless and insensible could not eat at such a time; though tearful ladies took wine pressed upon them by attentive cavaliers, as matrons and maidens stood about the passages and staircase waiting for carriages to draw up. Many were really affected by the sight they had witnessed, and needed restoratives.

The two physicians remained much longer, as well as a few personages whose relationship or intimate friendship gave them as it were a right to stay. Among them Mrs. Sutton, full of tenderness and wise counsel to Agnes and her mother; and Elizabeth Hardy, who at last only returned home to change her gay attire for a morning dress, and was back

again in an hour; and Dr. Bryant and Mr. Fairley—whose differences being rather of the head than of the heart—joined together in their anxieties, and compared notes of their suspicions.

It was broad day, a lovely summer morning, and the servants had long since extinguished the lights, before such friends departed; busy hands had even succeeded in clearing the supper-room, and were making a wild attempt to reduce things to something like order, and the quiet so necessary to the distressing occasion. Limb-wearied as the servants were, only a few among them retired to rest.

When poor Clara Blake recovered from her fainting fit, and knew and saw the condition of her husband, she was calmer than her friends had expected her to be. He was still speechless, but as she hung over him signs of intelligence passed between them, and he seemed relieved to find her so collected. She had found time to question Charles Farrell and she knew all that he could tell her. At his suggestion, she gave him Mr. Blake's keys, and took leave of him at last as if he were a benefactor.

"What strength of mind!" murmured one member of the household.

"What want of feeling!" whispered another.

Good people, you were both wrong. Clara's comparative calmness was owing to the removal of the strain which had nearly maddened her for the last three days and nights. Now at least she could weep unrestrainedly, and that was something; and, serious as her husband's seizure evidently was, he did not appear to be suffering acute pain, which was to her much; for she was singularly ignorant of the character of his disease. The fact that she had one open and avowed cause for grief, helped her to bear her secret load also.

Talk of the hardship of being encased in an iron mask with padlock and rivets, what was that to the mask the "woman of the world" had forged for herself, and worn the last three days with a stern endurance worthy of a better cause!

The sunshine slanted into the windows of the cab upon Millie's soiled gloves and crumpled handkerchief, as they lay in her lap, and upon the gossamer trimmings of her ball dress, hopelessly damaged by water, wine, and eau-de-Cologne, showing that hers had been an

active share in assuaging the late distresses. She was weeping bitterly; for she divined and dreaded even more than she knew, and moreover, it devolved on her to break to Mrs. Farrell the intelligence of her brother's seizure.

"Cheer up, Millie," exclaimed Charley, as they drove along; "it is of no use your giving way. Think what a blessing it is I was not made a partner two years ago, at the time my uncle took in Simmonds his head clerk."

"I thought," said Millie, still choking with tears—"I thought you considered yourself ill-used by the preference."

"So I did at the time; but you see we never know what is for our good. I am sure I thank heaven for it now."

"Why?"

"Because Blake and Co. are ruined—and Simmonds will go down like a stone in a wrecked and sinking ship. Poor creature! he's quite a snob—and with a wife and six children. Lucky for me that it was he who was chosen to have his two years of grandeur."

"And you?" asked Millie, in a clearer tone of voice, and looking at her brother fixedly as she spoke.

He happened not to return her gaze, as he answered—

"Oh, I shall build a bonnie raft out of the floating timbers."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MEN OF BUSINESS.

"O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant."

SHAKSPERE.

THE scene was a city house of business.

"But, sir, not only were we solvent three months ago, but Mr. Blake had realised a fortune of at least fifty thousand pounds."

"Pshaw! what has that to do with the question? Indeed, the world thought him worth thrice as much as you say."

The first speaker was Matthew Simmonds, the poor servant during long prosperity—the partner of recent disasters; the second was Mr. Basil Moore, a somewhat influential city man, the guest whose black eyes had glared

on Mrs. Blake with quite a terrible lustre the night of her brilliant assembly.

Nor was the terror his glance inflicted the mere product of her fear or fancy. Basil Moore was a double-natured man—not double-natured in the grand, harmonious sense of the poet—but a man whose faults and virtues stood rigidly forth side by side in his character, instead of being softened, and blended, and intertwined by human tendernesses and gentle gradations. The consequence was that his countenance, suiting itself to the mood of the moment, was capable of two such opposite expressions that he seemed at different times two different men. There were people, however, who said that the two sides of his face were absolutely different in expression—and declaring that the two profiles, separately painted, would give indications of the two moods, argued that it was as right or left ruled that the gazer saw; but such observers were usually those crotchety people who always see and think a great deal more than their hum-drum neighbours. Certain it is that he had remarkable eyes; and that it was some one whom he did not like, who, by adding a syllable to his name, first gave him the sobriquet of Basilisk Moore.

Charles Farrell's prediction had been fulfilled to the letter. But a few weeks had passed, and not only had the "crash" come by Blake and Co. stopping payment, but angry creditors were disputing over the wreck and ruin of affairs, in their vain efforts to dig out something more than five shillings in the pound.

Mr. Basil Moore was one of the principal creditors; and, though he was rich enough to bear the shock he had received without tottering, the consciousness of his inevitably heavy loss did not improve his temper, or make him tolerant towards those who opposed his views. The heavy amount of his claim, together with his high position in the mercantile world, gave him such importance among the sufferers, that in reality it was his will that must settle the question whether Mr. Blake should be treated with lenity or severity.

"If you fall into my plans and dissolve the partnership," continued Mr. Moore, addressing Matthew Simmonds, "I will do what I can to make things smooth, and start you afresh. But I will have nothing whatever to do with Compton Blake."

And, while awaiting poor Simmonds's answer, Mr. Moore refreshed himself with a pinch

of snuff; his snuff-taking in the midst of argument or contention being always a token of obstinacy at high pressure, and a sort of equivalent for "*le roi le veut.*"

"But, sir, what is to become of Mr. Blake?" urged Simmonds, timidly and entreatingly.

"That is not my affair."

"In his ruined state of health," pursued Simmonds, "it is impossible he could re-establish himself in business without my assistance. What can he do?"

"Nothing, I suppose. But that would be better than all he has been doing lately. And we are heavily taxed to pay for workhouses; and London hospitals and charities are most liberally supported."

"Oh, Mr. Moore!" sighed forth poor Simmonds.

"Besides," said the other, "we have granted him his plate and furniture—that is to say, all the old things which are paid for. And this would not have been done, only we did not like selling off your cradles and pap-boats; and the rest of the creditors persuaded me that we could not make a difference between you."

"Mr. Blake also has children," said Simmonds, in a voice which was now husky.

"Let his fine-lady wife work for them," replied Basil Moore; "I have heard that she worked for her living before Blake married her; let her do it again, and try the experiment of how far her fashionable friends will give her patronage. I tell you, Simmonds, that that woman has been his ruin."

"Indeed, indeed, sir," persisted poor Simmonds, "Mr. Blake could well afford to keep up his sumptuous establishment. Our losses have been occasioned by two unhappy speculations, and by the failures of other houses with which we had relations."

"Just so," returned the other; "but, remember, I have known Compton Blake for twenty years, and I tell you that if his head had not been dazed by the life he was leading, he would never have entered upon those unhappy speculations, or allowed himself to drift into close relationship with failing houses. I know what I say, and his painted Jezabel of a wife may answer for all that has happened. While Mrs. Moore was alive I declined some overtures for private acquaintance; and right glad am I that I did so. I only went to his assembly the other night out of curiosity, and because my suspicions were excited; but if

we were Arabs we might still be foes, for I have never broken bread under his roof."

Simmonds sighed audibly.

"Mat, what a fool you are," pursued Basil Moore, "nobody blames you; on the contrary, we all know you have been the slave and the drudge—"

"Ah! but Mr. Blake has been the presiding spirit—the head—the ruler," ejaculated Simmonds.

"And a pretty rule he has made of it. I tell you what it is, if you will cut yourself clear of all future interest in Blake, we will start you afresh by yourself; and I don't see why you should not keep three-fourths of the old business. Why, the Riga agency alone, which don't require capital to work, would be enough for you to live by, and you shall have all I can throw in your way."

"Sir, the Riga agency is already gone," replied Simmonds.

"Gone! Why how can a stranger work it?"

"It is given to Mr. Farrell, Mr. Blake's nephew; a young gentleman who was in the office."

"Well, that is a queer start."

"It has been a great blow, I assure you;

and a circumstance no one has dared yet to mention to Mr. Blake."

"Why not?"

"Because the physicians say that any fresh shock might bring on another attack of his malady. Yet he must know it very soon, for Mr. Farrell has taken offices already; indeed, the young man appears to have solicited the business within three days of our calamity."

"Well, perhaps it is all for the best. Mr. Blake's nephew, you say—then, of course, he will now provide for his uncle and his family, so no one need be troubled any longer with sentimental sorrow about the great reverse."

And Basil Moore took another pinch of snuff.

"I hope Mr. Farrell may do what is right," said Simmonds, but the "hope" had a certain ring in it like a note of music that is out of tune.

"I tell you what," continued Basil Moore, "I shall come out to Brixton to-morrow evening; so prepare your wife for an onslaught on her tea and bread-and-butter. We then can talk the thing thoroughly out without interruption, and I know I shall have your wife on my side. You hear how that outer door

has been going the last quarter of an hour, and I believe I have half-a-dozen persons waiting for me in the next room."

Of course Matthew Simmonds took the hint, and saying something about the honour of seeing Mr. Moore at Waverley Terrace, rose to depart. Mr. Moore put out his hand —rather an unusual mark of courtesy towards his companion.

The world called Basil Moore a man eminently "true and just in all his dealings;" and it must be admitted that he could, moreover, be generous on occasion. And yet he was equipped with a very armour of prejudices, knowing them for what they were, and not contending with, but cherishing them; declaring that a man without prejudices was a mere reed swayed hither and thither by every breeze of opinion. His prejudices sometimes made him positively cruel. And yet he could be kind and benevolent; but then the kindness must be done entirely in his own way, not after the fashion of the recipient's wishes if they at all differed from his. The people he helped must consent to be patronized, and be willing to be led; under these conditions he would give and guide, and would organise

plans for them to carry out as if the doing so were positively a mental recreation. And all the while he himself abhorred patronage; and if from any circumstances of his life a sentiment of gratitude had crept into his heart, he had never rested till he had cast forth the burthen by means of some preposterous over-requital of the service he had received.

If Basil Moore had looked deep into his own heart he would, perhaps, have found that Compton Blake was once the object of his envy, as he now was of his hatred; but the so-called just man was not much given to introspection, and if any feeble promptings of pity had made themselves heard in his mind, he had silenced such pleadings by persuading himself that his present harsh proceedings were but the necessary means of asserting the majesty of truth and justice.

The great man of a small world was punctual the next evening at the Brixton tea-table; and gentle Mrs. Simmonds saw nothing fierce or terrible in his bright black eyes. Nay, she thought how fortunate were the insolvent merchants in having so liberal and kind-hearted a man for their principal creditor. Rarely in her married life had she thought

differently on any subject from her husband; but she almost began to fear that trouble had turned his brain, when she found him hesitating about Mr. Moore's proposals. She was too wise a wife to say much, but her silent tears had a certain persuasive effect that was somehow helped by the sight of the youngest child—one so young that his mind was not opened to comprehend the discourse—sitting contentedly on Mr. Moore's knee, playing with his watch-chain.

Honest Simmonds promised to give Mr. Moore a final answer the next day; but the condescending visitor went away satisfied that his point was gained. He kissed the little child; and before he departed he praised the minute flower-garden—though Basil Moore was a great horticulturist, and, like many a hard man, had a taste for gardening—and he saw a wondrous likeness in the wretched daub of a portrait of Mrs. Simmonds which decorated the little drawing-room. As he walked down the high road of the Brixtonian district at a leisurely pace, expecting an omnibus to overtake him, he rather admired himself for taking so much trouble to assist a man who was not over-willing to be helped. Of course

he attributed his own conduct to pure benevolence, and reflected on the pleasure to be found in doing good. He did not perceive that on this occasion the wheels which set his benevolence in motion revolved in the dark atmosphere engendered by "envy, hatred, and malice."

"As I hope to leave an honest name behind me at last," exclaimed Mr. Simmonds to his wife, as he was quitting home the next morning, his breakfast nearly untasted, "as I hope for this, I would not make a separate interest, and seem to desert the kind master of half my life, and now the afflicted friend, if I did not believe it the surest way of saving him from want. But, my dear, be very careful what you say—in fact, you had better say nothing—about my feelings and motives; for though Mr. Moore can be a kind friend, he can also be a cruel enemy. I begin to see that pleading for poor Mr. Blake only makes his foe the more bitter. My dear, it is much easier to speak soft words to women and children than to forego the opportunity of revenge—at least, with some natures; though

really till lately I thought such stormy passions were tamed now-a-days, and were only made much of in novels and plays. Well, we must live and learn; I feel in all these troubles, and with myself being brought so forward, like a child going to a new school."

"Oh, Matthew, I declare you quite frighten me."

"Nay, nay," returned her husband, "don't be frightened. One soon gets accustomed to strange things. Now, Tom," he continued, addressing his eldest boy, "shall I drop you at school as usual?"

"In a minute, papa," said the boy, closing a book he had been eagerly scanning, and as he searched for his cap he went on muttering to himself a grammar lesson.

"Pray, my dear, keep up your spirits," continued Matthew Simmonds, stooping to give his wife a parting kiss, "keep up your spirits, and trust in Providence. Let us do our duty, whatever the world may think or say—ah, Life is a strange riddle, and we can only work it out by faith; life—life!"

"A word which signifies to be, to do, or to suffer—to be, to do, or to suffer—to be, to

do, or to suffer," repeated the school-boy in the un-understanding manner in which children generally recite their parrot lessons.

END OF VOL. I.

Billing, Printer, 103, Hatton Garden, London, and Guildford, Surrey.